

PZ

3

D931 OL

**FT MEADE
GenColl**



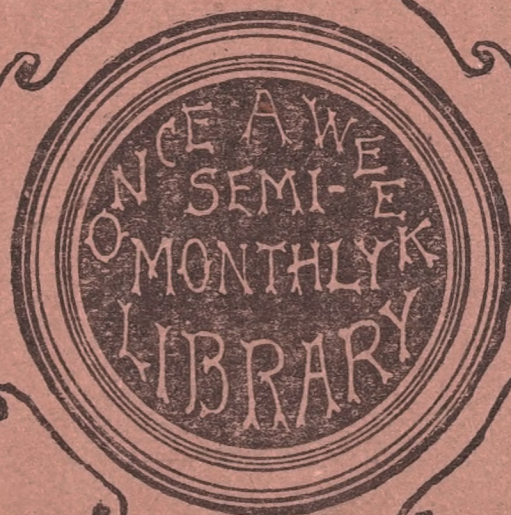


CaD7-4791

An Old Folks' Wooing

BY
HENRY GRÉVILLE

Specially translated for "Once a Week Library" by
E. P. ROBINS



Pears' Soap

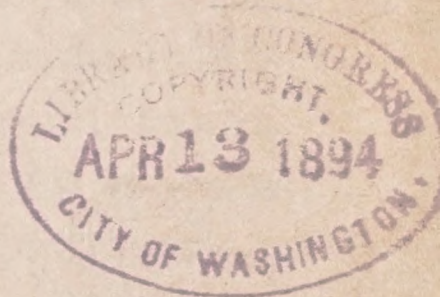
Pears' Soap does nothing but cleanse ; it has no medical properties, but brings back health and the color of health to many a sallow skin. Use it often. Give it time.

AN OLD FOLKS' WOOING

BY
HENRY GRÉVILLE

Once a week
like Marie Céleste
Durand

Specially translated for "Once a Week Library" by
E. P. ROBINS



Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1894, by
PETER FENELON COLLIER,
in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington.

PZ3
101061

AN OLD FOLKS' WOOING.

I.

IN a retired corner near the fireplace, where he was equally removed from the danger of being run down by the dancers and the risk of taking cold from insidious draughts, Fontenoy, crush-hat in hand, stood gazing on the phantasmagoric spectacle of black coats and gleaming shoulders. He was not particularly elated, neither was he specially bored by his contemplation of those evolutions wherein he had for a long time been a participator, and in which, for some years past, he had ceased to figure, unless under constraint and duress. Rare indeed are they who waltz for the pleasure of it when their fortieth year is past! Should some minister take it in his head to create a special decoration for them, perhaps we should see an increase in the number of waltzers; but in that event it would be for the glory, not for the pleasure of the thing.

“To think that I was that way once!” reflected Fontenoy, as he beheld some young men when the waltz came to an end surreptitiously

take their handkerchiefs from their pocket and slip out into the vestibule to wipe their perspiring brow. "I have danced—not too madly—I have supped—pretty much everywhere—I have—"

His retrospective meditation was interrupted by a hand laid lightly on his arm. He turned to look at the interruptor and discovered him to be an old friend.

"What, my dear sir, are you here?" said Fontenoy, with as much deference as the place and circumstances permitted. The current of young people setting in the direction of the buffet occasionally backed up against them, producing little eddies and whirlpools that were the reverse of comfortable; he adroitly changed places with Comte Forest, standing before him and affording him a measure of protection.

"Did you think, because I have selected as the refuge of my old age a spot less crowded than the Boulevard Malesherbes, that I had turned hermit out and out? I live at Cerisy, I admit, although the locality is not of the most fashionable; but during the months of January and February I am to be met with in the world—I have not entirely renounced its pomps and vanities, although I am no longer an active sharer in its labors. And you, how do you spend your time?"

"I am a looker-on," Fontenoy replied; "I watch the dancers—and I watch people live."

"You live too, so I'm told, and don't find

life such a very heavy burden," said Forest, scrutinizing his friend from the corner of an eye that was bright and restless as a bird's. "I saw Mme. Fontenoy just now; she is handsome as an angel—I congratulate you."

Fontenoy bowed with the air of a man to whom the compliment was an old story; no one ever conversed with him for five minutes in a ball-room without alluding to the beauty of his wife. The stream of men and women had grown thinner and thinner and finally dribbled out; the spacious room appeared still more spacious in its emptiness; here and there lay scattered on the floor a strip of tulle, bits of lace and ribbon, a flower that had graced some corsage; the electric lights shed their impartial light upon all these things and on a few dejected young men who had been unable to force an entrance to the supper-room.

"Let's sit down," said the Comte; "my legs are conscious of their burden of seventy-two years, and I don't know why it is that they tire more quickly on the waxed floor than on our woodland paths. How young you look, Fontenoy—positively you do! It is astonishing! And yet—no one can hear us—you disclosed the date of your birth on the day when I had the pleasure of acting as witness at your marriage. That was nineteen years ago. You were thirty then, my young friend; that makes you forty-nine to-day. You can own up to forty and not be afraid; no one will think of adding more than two or three years."

"What difference does it make?" Fontenoy murmured with an absent air.

"Eh! it makes a great difference, my young friend, particularly as we begin to grow old. I say *we*; it is merely a manner of expressing myself. What a pity it is that your children did not live! You would have to-day a marriageable daughter and a son about graduating from college. That would steady you and give you something to think about."

Fontenoy checked an incipient yawn. The old bore! a fine time he had selected for delivering his lecture!

"You have enjoyed yourself, Fontenoy; you have had a good time. I am not blaming you for it, understand; but there comes a time when, if we wish to make old bones, we must give up enjoying ourselves—so as not to add to the enjoyment of others. The transition is not agreeable; it comes hard. I settled the question by going to live in the country. The remedy was heroic, you know! But I was an old bachelor; for a married man there are more difficulties in the way."

Fontenoy listened more attentively. He felt that Forest was right; but there are truths that we do not like to hear. We tolerate them sometimes, but only in the privacy of our own minds, where we handle them very tenderly, on rainy days or after a night of bad luck at cards.

"The first white hair," Forest went on, "amounts to nothing at all; we pluck it out and say to ourselves: 'Nature has strange

freaks sometimes!' and think no more of it. But when we find a whole grove of them growing on our head we do not dismiss the matter so lightly. And that is not so bad as to lose all your hair. When I was sixty I had to provide myself with a little 'head-warmer'—not out of vanity, I beg you to believe, but I was continually taking cold, and as I value my precious life— You will never have need of that, though! Your crop is pepper-and-salt, but it is superb! You look like one of Clouet's portraits with your square-trimmed beard and your hair *en brosse*!"

Fontenoy smiled; while one may not be a coxcomb, a truth from the lips of a friend is never disagreeable.

"You and your wife are an extremely good-looking pair; your portraits would look well hung as pendants in a gallery. What a pretty girl Mlle. Edmée de Pressac was the day you conducted her to the altar! She made a picture that one does not soon forget. And charming withal, distinguished in mind and person, and so amiable! You were singularly blessed, dear sir, in making a marriage of expediency, which was at the same time a marriage of love. You will have gathered all the flowers of life. But here come the men, maids and matrons, with re-enforcements; they are going to abandon themselves to saltatory exercise, and I am going to bed. Good-night."

He gave his hand to Fontenoy, who retained it in his own.

“Will you come and dine with us some day?” he asked.

“Certainly; provided it is a family dinner, or at least a very small one. And then you must know that I don’t make a point of truffles. I have eaten such quantities of them in my time that to-day I believe I would rather have a potato. Pardon a woodman’s bluntness.”

The old man vanished, leaving his friend in a somewhat troubled frame of mind. When we are young the idea of old age does not obtrude itself on us, or if it does the image is so dimmed and blurred by the mists of the remote future that its impression is fleeting and unsubstantial. But when we have passed our second youth and are approaching the third, although it may be dispiriting to reflect that the time is at hand when we shall have no youth at all, there are occasions when we are forced to look this disagreeable contingency in the face. When one is alone he dismisses it as best he can; but let it be propounded by some one else with its hard, confirmatory facts, and the idea takes possession of one and refuses to be exorcised.

Fontenoy was a sensible man, or very nearly so. He had no raw head and bloody bones to disturb his peace of mind. He knew that he must grow old, like every one else, and that, on the whole, this was probably the best thing that could happen him. He therefore made a mental promise to give this strange conversation further consideration at some future time. The present moment was hardly propitious to reflec-

tion of any kind; for the crowd had come back and resumed possession of the room, and the hospitable corner which had afforded him shelter earlier in the evening was now occupied by a fat, bald-headed gentleman with gold-bowed spectacles, who was inquisitively scrutinizing every one in his vicinity. All at once, Fontenoy perceived that he was unusually fatigued. What could be the cause of it? Was it the games of billiards he had played before coming there, or his horseback ride of the afternoon? or was it because he had not got to bed until four o'clock that morning? But that was nothing more than the ordinary round of his daily occupations, and they had never caused him any inconvenience before—a slight momentary sensation of fatigue on rising, maybe, that was quickly put to flight by the cold bath and a few minutes' exercise with the dumb-bells.

"I've a great mind to go home," he said to himself; "if Edmée don't mind we'll leave."

He looked to right and left, and finally discovered his wife—the center of a group—seated near a pillar and overarched by a cluster of tall palms.

"True as gospel, she was never prettier in her life!" he murmured to himself, contemplating her admiringly. "And yet she has thirty-eight years to her account, even as I have forty-nine. We are a well-preserved couple!"

He smiled—a not particularly happy smile it was—at his own conceit, and bent his steps toward Mme. Fontenoy.

Mme. Fontenoy was conversing, not without animation, but with the placidity of a woman who, during four or five months of the year, has accomplished these social observances for two lustrums; which gives the very respectable total of, say, two thousand evenings "out," due allowance being made for time lost by illness and other unavoidable causes. Unless a woman, by reason of qualities inherent in herself, finds society particularly attractive, she is apt to discover that pleasures of this nature pall after being exercised for such length of time. Therefore Mme. Fontenoy, seeing her husband coming toward her, rose and prepared to go with him.

"Where is Juliette?" he asked.

"Over there with the young girls. Shall I go and fetch her?"

"If you will be so kind."

But Juliette had seen them talking and came to them.

"Together, you? Oh, that is a very bad sign," said she. "When my uncle and my aunt are seen together, you may be sure that they have either just come or are just going away. And I have promised to dance the cotilion!"

Fontenoy was in a quandary. He did not like to disappoint Juliette, whom he loved and petted as if she had been a bright-colored, graceful bird; but, on the other hand, his fatigue was increasing and threatened to become insupportable.

"Auntie," the young lady entreated, "my dear, good aunt, I beseech you! don't condemn your naughty niece to go to bed yet."

"With whom do you dance the cotillion?" asked Mme. Fontenoy.

"With little Descrosses. I know very well that there is neither money nor glory to be gained, auntie," said Juliette in a low voice, and with a delicious smile that parted her red lips somewhat obliquely over her regular white teeth. "It's just for the fun there's in it! He is so amusing! Have pity on a poor girl who is working hard to secure a husband and doesn't have a good time every night!"

Mme. Fontenoy was unable to resist such an appeal. "Well, my friend," said she, addressing her husband, "do you go home without me. I will take Juliette home, and Francois will be sufficient protection for me. Only please don't forget to send the carriage back."

Two hours later, while conducting Juliette home to Mme. Chassagny's, her aunt could not resist the desire, natural enough in a chaperon, to learn whether "little Descrosses'" position toward the young girl was exactly what she had stated it to be. Girls are such strange creatures! and the little blind god sometimes shoots his arrows where you would least expect it. That Descrosses was not on the eligible list was a fact universally submitted. He was twenty-seven years old, possessed an income of six thousand francs, and was entirely destitute of talent or aptitude for any of the pro-

fessions. That is, of those professions which give a man standing and authorize him to aspire to a great fortune by marriage. Descrosses was a lawyer, but he would never again address a jury: his first case had finished him.

His client was a poor devil indicted for burglary. It was the opportunity of a lifetime! the young lawyer said. With no foundation to build on he reared a most extraordinary rhetorical structure, bristling at every point with fun and paradox and every sort of ridiculous and irrelevant ornament; the general effect being that of a display of fireworks on which rain has fallen and the various pieces of which go off when least expected, now with a bang, now with a sulphurous fizz and sputter, driving the artificers to shelter, spreading consternation among the spectators, and bringing the fête to an untimely end. Never in the memory of man had the Palais resounded with such merriment; the president alleged a violent cold in the head as an excuse for keeping his handkerchief constantly before the judicial face. The prisoner himself squirmed and wriggled on his bench between his hilarious guardians. The peroration elicited a storm of bravos and applause such as is never heard save in the playhouses; but M. Joseph Prudhomme does not care to be amused outside the temple of Melpomene. The young lawyer's harangue was voted flippant and impertinent. It is not permissible to ridicule the vices and miseries of a social state which, etc. To make a long story short, thanks to a cross-grained and

punctilious attorney-general and to a jury that took an unusually serious view of its duties, the unlucky burglar received the maximum penalty awarded by the law.

“What a success!” said Descrosses’s friends, “for a beginner.”

“Yes,” replied M. Joseph Prudhomme, “it is his first case, but it is also his last.”

He was quickly made to understand this. The imprudent man, with his keen wit and trenchant sallies, had mowed his harvest of glory before it was ripe; prospective clients, seeing that he had no standing with the court, carried their cases to other lawyers, men of less brilliancy but more solidity. Descrosses husbanded what reputation he had gained and waited.

“Some of these days,” said he, “the world will get over being stupid and tiresome, and then I’ll make a figure in the magistracy. What a president of assizes I would make! People wouldn’t go to sleep in my court-room, I warrant you!”

“You began too early,” Comte Forest, who had long known his family, said to him one day. “You forgot the story of Sixtus V., my young friend; and yet what a lesson is that which the grand old man has handed down to us! to hide our light to-day in order that it may shine with glorious brilliancy to-morrow. Why don’t you set up as a consulting lawyer?” suggested his venerable mentor.

“The thing is not to be thought of. A man

must be born to that, don't you see; and I was born for something quite different."

"For what, pray?"

"That's just where the trouble is! I don't know. Perhaps to paint like Daumier; only my talent has never been cultivated, and, I'm too old now to enter the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. I never could do much with a pencil. I think I'll be a professional leader of the German. That will probably keep down my superfluous flesh while I am young."

Calling to mind these well known traits of Descrosses's character, it seemed clear to Mme. Fontenoy that such an aggregate was not likely to arouse any very tender sentiments in her niece's bosom, and still—

"Did you find your partner in the cotilion as amusing as ever to-night?" she asked, just as the carriage was drawing up in front of Mme. Chassagny's door.

"I nearly cried my eyes out laughing, auntie. I'm sure I don't know where he picks up all his yarns. And then he is not a bad-hearted fellow, either; it's incredible!"

"He ought to have something to make up for that in which he is deficient."

"Do you mean that he is ugly? Do you really consider him ugly, auntie? He has such an intelligent face! Here we are. Thanks, my dear aunt; it was angelically good of you to waste half your night on me. We'll make it up to you when mamma gets well."

She planted a kiss on Mme. Fontenoy's cheek,

jumped lightly to the curb, barely grazing with her fingers the sleeve of the tall footman, and disappeared.

“I am not so very much the wiser after all,” Edmée reflected as she drove away. “The only thing calculated to throw any light on the subject is the freedom with which the girl spoke of that merry-andrew. But what does that prove? Juliette is not like other girls.”

II.

ON the morning after the soirée, Fabien Malvois awoke with a vague impression of something forgotten that should have been attended to, something extremely urgent and important; one of those impressions that haunt a man all day and destroy his pleasure. He jumped from his bed to the floor precipitately, as if about to run for a train, slipped on his dressing-gown with feverish haste, threw back his curtains and gave a look at the leaden sky that threatened snow, then stopped and began to think.

“I would like to know why I am hurrying like this,” he said to himself. “I have nothing so pressing on hand for this morning. But what can it be that I neglected yesterday?”

The glance that he cast about the chamber rested on his dress-coat, its button-hole decked with a faded flower, which told him nothing.

He had passed a pleasant evening with friends at the theater, and had finished up the night at a restaurant famed for its excellent suppers. There was nothing strange in that; it was not the first time, and would not be the last.

“But what can I have forgotten?” Fabien asked himself as he crossed over to his dressing-room. “I was not tipsy, I did not touch a card—and I was in by half-past three o’clock, which is a very respectable hour. What had I to do? for I certainly had something to do.”

The faculty of thought was suspended for a minute or two while he was under the salubrious influence of the shower-bath. The valet’s duties were restricted to brushing his master’s clothes, and the friction that he inflicted on himself occupied him entirely. As he was returning to his bedroom—warmed and cooled at the same time—his eyes lighted on the corner of a square of bristol board, half-buried under a pile of newspapers of the day before. He took it, looked at it, and threw it down disgustedly.

“I knew very well I had forgotten something. It was that ball—that long-talked-of ball at Mme. de Classens’—which I had promised to attend, and where my dear cousin Fontenoy was to present me to a niece of his, or of his wife’s—I don’t know which; at all events, a charming young lady with a handsome dowry. And to think that it slipped my mind entirely—entirely!”

With an expression of deep contrition on his face he reckoned up the visits that his heedless-

ness would cost him: one to Madame de Classens, one to the person who had presented him to her, one to his cousin Fontenoy—who would present him to his wife—and one to Mme. Fontenoy, when she should have accorded him permission to show himself in her salon: in all, four. And he might have spared himself at least half the number by a slight exercise of memory.

“It is not so very bad, after all; a little disagreeable exertion will set things straight,” said Fabien to himself; for he did not like to remain longer than he could help under the influence of unpleasant thoughts. “And first for my cousin Fontenoy, for it is he who has most right to feel offended.”

A short while after breakfast Fabien, dressed in the newest style and faultlessly cravated, shod and gloved, sent in his card, and was received with the greatest affability. He was too discreet to make confession of his faulty memory, for that would have been an unpardonable blunder against the usages of good society; but pleaded instead as his excuse a business engagement of the highest importance.

Fontenoy listened to his tale with an indulgent smile, and when he had finished looked him in the eyes without questioning him too closely; he knew how much confidence to repose in the excuse, having frequently employed it himself.

“The sum and substance of the matter is that you were unable to come,” he said. “I am very sorry, but it is only adjourning our pleasure

until another day. If you like I will introduce you to my wife; we do not dance here, but we give a dinner now and then, and sometimes have a little music; it comes to pretty much the same thing in the end."

Having first inquired if Mme. Fontenoy was at home, the husband left Fabien alone for a moment and went to ask if she would receive them.

"He is a very agreeable young fellow," said he. "We are distant relatives, and his father, who was a man much older than I, was my friend. He has been abroad a good deal of late, but now he wants to settle down in Paris and marry. You are always so kind for everyone, my dear, I thought you would not refuse him your protection."

"Bring him in," Edmée simply replied.

Notwithstanding Mme. Fontenoy's reputation for beauty, Fabien had not looked forward to seeing so pretty, and, still more, so young a woman. She had married early in life, and consequently had labored under the disadvantage of having to maintain her prestige over a period of twenty years. In place of the artistic restoration of a glorious past which he had expected to see, the young man was delighted to find a fair structure of the present day, and his attitude expressed, not surprise, which would have hardly been polite, but pleasure, which was becoming and gallant. They parted, after a few agreeable speeches had been interchanged, well pleased with one another.

“He’s quite presentable, don’t you think so?” said Fontenoy, who had remained in his wife’s drawing-room. He was toying with a carved ivory paper-cutter, while she had resumed the book that she had laid aside on her husband’s entrance.

“He is altogether charming,” she replied in her low sweet voice. “How happens it that you have never brought him here before?”

“He had interests in England and was obliged to go out to India to settle his affairs. More recently he has met with afflictions—and has come into property.”

“That accounts for it all,” Edmée calmly said. “You wish to find him a wife?”

“If it be possible.”

“Well, we’ll arrange a dinner for him.”

“By the way, my dear, would you object to inviting our old friend Comte Forest some day? Only the party must be a very quiet one. He asked it as a favor.”

A pink flush rose to Edmée’s pale cheeks and her eyes sparkled with pleasure. “Our old friend Forest? I shall be delighted! Ah, how time flies! It is at least ten years since we have seen him, except for a casual meeting now and then. What a strange thing is society! We lose sight of one another and meet again after years and years.”

“Don’t you think it would be a good plan to have Forest and Fabien together? With a few others to keep them company, of course—your niece, for instance.”

Edmée's penetrating look rested for a moment on her husband's tranquil face. "And some young women," said she; "for women are a necessity at a dinner party, and the prettier they are the better."

"Act as you think best; whatever you do cannot fail to please me," Fontenoy politely said. "Suppose you ask the Verseleys?"

"Very well."

"That's understood, then. I owe an acknowledgment to Verseley. Are you going out?"

"Not now; later."

"Then I will leave you. Good-by."

Very graciously he bent and kissed the pretty hand that held the book, then replaced the paper-cutter on the table and left the room with the jaunty ease of a handsome, rich and happy man. When he was gone the volume slid gently from her lap to the floor and Edmée took no notice, for she had remained with eyes riveted on the sumptuous tapestries that masked the door through which her husband had vanished.

During the space of twenty years he had presented to her many men, most of whom were agreeable and attractive. She felt it was due to him to admit that he had always behaved nobly, generously, with a confidence that reflected honor on him. Was it confidence, or was it indifference? A little of both, perhaps. However that might be, she had always been treated by her husband with respect and esteem, and even a certain degree of friendship.

She was conscious of a feeling of profound bitterness. She rose to escape her thoughts and passed into the adjoining room, which was her bedroom; but she had scarce more than crossed the threshold when she turned about and gazed straight before her. The opposite door on which her eyes rested was that of her husband's bedroom, separated from hers by that little drawing-room in which most of her time was spent. It was through that door, across that drawing-room, that he had come to her on their wedding night—twenty years ago.

In those days she had called him Gilbert and he had called her Edmée; now she addressed him as: "My friend," and he responded with: "My dear." They had never had a quarrel, nothing more serious than an occasional slight tiff, and those—thanks to their good breeding and good sense—had never been allowed to go very far. They had entered their new life with every imaginable worldly blessing, including that of a bishop *in partibus*, who had solemnized their nuptials; with equal fortunes; that fine old mansion where they lived so comfortably; with beauty, intelligence, honor, troops of friends. What would they have more, the lucky creatures! They had all those things, and in addition, they had love; or, if not love, then a very sincere liking for each other. They had had an inexpressibly delightful honeymoon, and after that, at intervals of two years, two children, whom they had lost during an epidemic of croup, when the poor little things were babies.

And then in some way—neither of them could have told exactly how—that sorrow which should have been the means of bringing them closer to each other, served to some extent to part them; perhaps because a mother's life is bound up in her children, while the father feels less deeply trials of this nature; perhaps, too, because a man's affliction does not deter him from going abroad and pursuing his usual avocations, while custom confines a woman to the house. However that may be, the ribbon of silk and gold which had connected the young couple had imperceptibly loosed its knots; it held them imprisoned still, but not with its former rigor; it would have required but little to make the two ends fall asunder, never to be re-united.

Mme. Fontenoy continued gazing at the door of her husband's chamber; that and the corresponding one, the door of her own room, constituted the two ends of that nuptial ribbon. The tie had never been severed or loosed, because in twenty years those doors had never once been closed.

Not once; and yet many a time the young wife, chafing under her desertion, had stepped forward intending to push the bolt, and who shall say that the husband, in his confused sense of having done wrong, may not have thought of locking himself in to brood over his remorse and memories of the past? They had neither of them dared to take that decisive step which would have been the material evidence of their moral separation, and the two doors continued

to remain open night and day on the little drawing-room where Edmée spent her time.

When she was not going out, Fontenoy often came in after dinner for a few minutes' chat with his wife before paying his customary visit to the club. He would tell her of what was going on in the great world outside, while she would make him acquainted with the latest news of the smaller world of fashion, and the moment was really one of pleasure to them both. "They loved each other very well," according to that expression into which there enters no portion of love and only an infinitesimal portion of friendship.

And now Edmée was looking at those doors which once had opened to afford her visions of a life of wedded bliss, through which now came indifference and neglect, through which soon would come old age, solitude and death.

"Oh, my life! my ruined life!" she suddenly exclaimed, wounded in the tenderest fibers of her being by a weapon whose keen point, penetrating stealthily, almost unconsciously to her, had reached an exposed nerve and wrested from her that cry of anguish and distress.

She recovered herself at once. A woman of the world does not cry. What would people think of her should they detect her crying? She rang for her maid, dressed for the street, left the house with calm, unhurried steps, and entered the nearest church. It was a mean, forbidding church, resorted to by the poor. So much the better; she would feel more at

ease. Selecting the darkest corner she went down on her knees, and, like a simple woman of the people, while the shades of night descended, wept her fill.

She had long felt them rising, those hot tears, the overflow of many a repressed sorrow; but had always forced herself to believe there was no cause for them. What subject of complaint had she? Was not her lot as good as that of other women whom she knew; nay, was it not a hundred-fold better? After some years of an affection at which more experienced persons smile—some with indulgent pity, others with mocking sneers—is it not quite the correct thing, quite natural, that man and wife should become strangers to each other? Provided the honor of the name and of the situation is maintained intact by the husband as well as by the wife, what can any one ask more? Does it not redound to the credit of the husband? Is he not in every sense a gentleman? Then why should a beautiful woman like Mme. Fontenoy give way to tears?

Still she continued to weep scalding tears, even as though she had been a schoolgirl of fifteen. She lowered her head and shrank within herself, fearing to be seen by the few women of the people who had come there to offer up a prayer. Finally, observing that no one paid attention to her, she plucked up courage and seated herself on the chair that was behind her.

Little by little her tears ceased to flow, and

she subsided into a sort of lethargy. What right had she to say she was unhappy? Her husband was good to her—save that he had not loved her this long time. But had he ever loved her? She shook off the torpor that was stealing over her and set to work to evoke her memories of the past. No, he had never loved her; it was not love that he had felt for her; the sentiment that bound them together had in it nothing of the ardor and headlong impulses of passion. He was young; she was pretty; her family had bestowed her on him in marriage; he had wearied of her—no one could make her believe that *that* was love. And she—had she loved him?

In all candor and sincerity, Edmée laid bare her conscience and asked herself the question. She had believed she loved him: a woman descends to the level of the most infamous creatures who, not acting under duress, having unrestricted freedom of choice, accepts a man to be her husband without loving him. Yes, she had believed it to be love. But was it? She could not tell.

She had seen Gilbert draw away from her without excessive pain and indignation; trivial circumstances that wounded her womanly pride, trifling quarrels, dismissed with a shrug of the shoulders, these were the things that had accompanied and heralded the vanishment of the lover in the husband. After that, too proud to manifest her displeasure by word or deed, too reserved and careful of her wifely dignity to make advances to the deserter, she had allowed

him to lead the life that pleased him best, without seeing what the inevitable end must be. When, finally, she saw that he would return to her no more, it was too late. It made no great difference to her on the whole. He continued to show her the same consideration and attention that he had always done, and her friends extolled Fontenoy, the "pattern husband," with a tinge of envious irony. Was not that enough?

And now she had revolted, wondering herself at her revolt. Why did she suffer to-day from that which she had faced so long without wincing? She could not have told; but she was conscious of a lament that rose constantly to her lips and returned with cruel iteration: "I have not lived!"

Not lived! Surrounded by luxury, and with more than her share of beauty and intelligence! "But look at those women on their knees there beside you," she said to herself; "it is they who have not lived. As for you, you have had everything, everything! and you are no better than an ungrateful wretch."

Vainly she reasoned with herself, her agitated feelings would not be appeased. At last a great cry rose within her, which she silenced by an effort of her will before it reached her lips, and she sank to her knees again upon the prie-Dieu: "My children!"

Ah, had she but had her children how different would have been her life! Solitude would have had no terrors for her then, she would not have known discouragement! They had

died while very young, she had hardly had time to know them; and then the rich have so little opportunity to exercise the maternal instinct! The little creatures are more the property of their nurse than of their mother. Why had she not nursed her babies? In the case of her first-born it was Gilbert's wish that she should not; but as for the other the responsibility was hers, in order that one might not be more favored than the other; for he would not then have opposed her wish. And if she had only nursed that one perhaps she might have saved him! Ah, to feel those little rosy lips drawing vigor and life from one, that was a joy she was fated never to know, and the fault was her own.

"My life! my lost, my wasted life! O that I were one of those women yonder. In a single year of their wretched existence they have more happiness than I shall have known in all my life!"

The bell, tolling six, warned her that it was time to go home. How could she present herself before her household in that condition, her eyes red and swollen with tears? She lowered her veil, that she had raised to wipe her poor aching eyes, and with a violent effort rose to her feet, stiff and sore after retaining so long an unaccustomed posture.

"I won't cry any more," she said to herself. "It's foolish, and besides it does no good."

When she reached the porch the cold wind blowing on her face revived her. With the

calm, unruffled bearing of a woman of society she descended the low flight of stone steps and bent her way toward home.

During those two hours of weeping and bitter introspection it had never once occurred to Mme. Fontenoy that many women, when deserted by their husband, console themselves with the love of another man, and that there was nothing to prevent her from doing the same.

III.

MME. FONTENOY was doing the honors of the unostentatious dinner tendered to Comte Forest. The comte, Fabien, Juliette, the Verseleys, another married couple, a bachelor and two pretty but penniless sisters—invited for their proficiency in music—composed a tranquil and agreeable assemblage—one of those gatherings where one always finds some one with whom to have a little pleasant converse, and which one leaves without overwhelming regret.

The dinner itself was irreproachable—only one dish with truffles; the remainder extremely simple and unpretentious, but exquisitely cooked and served. The service was noiseless, swift and vigilant. To give such a banquet one must have been for long years ruler of a house and have the co-operation of a corps of well-trained servants. Comte Forest was fit to give an opinion on such matters, and under cover of

the conversation availed himself of an opportunity to compliment his hostess.

"You have progressed in the way of wisdom," he said to her, "since the day when I had the honor of assisting at your wedding."

"We won't speak of that, if you please," she replied, with a pleasant smile and something like a flash in her fine eyes, which were neither brown nor gray, but of the color of Spanish topaz—a deep golden brown.

"Why not?"

"Because it would be reminding you of your age to no purpose. You look every bit as young to-day as you did then, dear Comte, and yet twenty years have passed over our heads."

Forest gave a moment's appreciative attention to the *petits pois à la crème* that solicited his fork, then cast a sweeping glance upon the company.

"A very fine-looking man your husband is, my dear child—a very fine-looking man, indeed, I assure you," said he, in a tone of conviction.

The smile faded slowly from Mme. Fontenoy's lips. A certain lassitude was all that remained of her recent shock, a dread of anything that might tend to revive her ancient sorrow and an anxious desire to avoid it. The thought of her husband seemed to her dangerous. When she saw him she forbade her thoughts to dwell on him. It was remembrance of the past that frightened and alarmed her.

Lending an unlistening ear to the observa-

tions of her other neighbor, Edmée gave a swift glance around the table to see that all was as it should be, and suddenly started as if her gaze had lighted on a basilisk. How could she have failed to detect the meaning of the comedy—or was it a drama?—that was being carried on by Fontenoy and Mme. Verseley? And why did she see it to-day with a distinctness that left no room for doubt?

Attired in a gown of sea-green silk so fashioned by the milliner's art as to display the sinuous graces of her lithe and supple form, and which shot back the light in broken, shimmering rays like the pale reflections from the caverns of some gigantic ocean billow. The young woman was not unlike one of those fabled beings that haunt the translucent submarine wastes and lure men to their ruin, the face was striking rather than beautiful, and the black hair, arranged in smooth bandeaux over a narrow forehead, gave her something the appearance of a serpent. "A viper's head," her enemies called it; but at all events it was the head of a very charming viper.

This strange woman—whose gown, scarcely open at the neck, gave one the impression that she was shamelessly *décolletée*—was seated at Fontenoy's side, and yet seemed parted from him by a space of a hundred leagues. She paid him no attention, listening with apparent interest to Fabien's utterances, who, very wide awake and capable of appreciating his fair neighbor's charm, had launched out into a

brilliant conversation, one of those semi-monologues in which men of the world excel, which have no significance except for one pair of ears, and in which one can say quantities of things that the uninitiated would suppose to be utterly void of meaning. Fontenoy, who, at the utmost, received only a portion of the overflow of this torrent of eloquence, confined his conversation almost exclusively to his neighbor on the other side, and yet his wife, by a sudden and certain intuition, saw that he was jealous, that Mme. Verseley alone occupied his thoughts, and that he certainly had had claims on her which he possessed no longer.

A glance at the masculine Verseley was the necessary complement of this discovery. Edmée's rapid look showed him to be a nullity, a pretentious idiot enchanted with himself and his own folly. The indignation that the good woman had ready to bestow on him was suddenly transmuted into scornful pity. But the other, Fontenoy, why had he that cold and sarcastic smile when he spoke to Mme. Verseley? Why had he insisted on having her to dinner if they had quarreled? For it was he—

“And to think,” reflected Edmée, “that for the last two years my door has been open to that woman-serpent! She is horrid in her snake-skin! She has no right to appear in my drawing-room undressed like that!”

Her scorn was legible in the flexible corners of her mouth. Forest was watching her furtively; he wished to ascertain if she knew.

"That young lady, next your husband; she is a remarkable looking person; has a style of beauty of her own. Friend of yours?"

"No; she is a friend of my husband," Mme. Fontenoy shortly rejoined.

Forest was satisfied.

"Is that your niece, that pretty girl over there?" he asked, directing his monocle over Juliette's way. "She is charming! The rose itself is not fresher or sweeter. She is Mme. Chassagny's daughter, isn't she?"

"Yes; since my brother-in-law's death my sister's health has been feeble. She does not go out at all now, and as I am very fond of Juliette I serve as her chaperon. It is nice to have a young girl in the house."

"Yes, especially when you can secure one who has already been broken to harness," Forest added. "I often wonder at the courage mothers display in bringing up their daughters, in view of the little pleasure and profit they derive from them. They are allowed to keep their nestlings so long as they are not full-fledged, and to have all the worry and trouble that they necessarily impose; but the moment that the process of education is completed and the young bird's fine feathers are fully grown, along comes a husband and carries her off to another cage."

"We should not call it a cage, should we?" said Edmée, with a laugh.

"You think not?"

Forest's searching look read Mme. Fontenoy's inmost soul. So she had not found the estate

of matrimony to be a prison? Probably the reason was that she had never attempted to try her wings. He felt a profound sentiment of respect for the upright woman whom he had known from childhood; and, by an easily explicable impulse, his eyes reverted to Mme. Verseley. There was another woman who did not chafe under the matrimonial bond—but for quite a different reason.

The dinner disposed of, the company passed to the drawing-room. Suddenly Fabien perceived that Fontenoy was looking at him with displeasure. He was sufficiently versed in the ways of the world to comprehend that his assiduities toward his captivating neighbor were not regarded favorably by his relative; whereon he proceeded to give her the cold shoulder with surprising celerity.

“My cousin should put up a sign,” he mentally observed: “‘*No poaching on these premises.*’ But that doesn’t absolve me. I was a donkey not to ascertain whether or no the shooting was preserved. Let’s try and see if we can mend matters.”

Mending matters consisted in making himself agreeable to Mme. Fontenoy. The young man applied himself to the undertaking, and was favored with a moderate measure of success. Edmée was naturally of a kindly disposition, and disposed to look on the bright side of things. She recognized Fabien’s manifest desire to please, and met his efforts half-way.

When the guests had all left, Juliette, wrapped

in her cloak, and wearing on her head a bewitching little fur toque, came up to kiss her aunt good-night.

"Your party was a very agreeable one," said she, "but there was nothing there for me."

"How, nothing for you? Wasn't Comte Forest there?"

And the two women laughed merrily.

"He is perfectly delightful; and really, quite a young man."

"I know what you are going to say, auntie: younger than most of our young men of the present day. It is what every one always says. But that brand-new gentleman you had—M. Malvois I believe his name is—who's he?"

"A distant cousin of your uncle's. What do you think of him?"

"Oh, my dear aunt! what a question!" Juliette replied, with an air of offended delicacy. "Do we girls ever permit ourselves to say what we think of a young man, and of a young man, too, who— Well, never mind; if I should tell you what I think of him you would give me a piece of your mind."

"Go on and tell it all the same," urged Mme. Fontenoy, highly amused.

"Well, I think that if he expects to marry into our set it will be as well for him to be less attentive to other folks' wives. When one is married she knows what she has got to look forward to—"

"Juliette!"

"Why, auntie, we know that our husbands

will pay attention to other women. Isn't it always so? There now! You see that I know what I'm talking about! But that's no reason why a man should commence his practices before he is married; it really is not encouraging. Besides, do you yourself like that Verseley woman?"

"Juliette, you are not nice."

"Neither is she; the more shame to her! A decent woman doesn't go dressed as she does! And with such airs of modesty! And a dress cut high-necked, almost! It's scandalous, you know. If I were you I wouldn't let her darken my doors. Who introduces those people to you?"

"Your uncle."

"I am surprised. One would suppose he couldn't endure her. I observed him when he was talking to her; he made a face as if he were eating overhigh game. Good-night, my adored aunt, I am going now. I know it would require until to-morrow to express all you feel on the subject of my naughtiness, and I love you too much too cause you a sleepless night—unless when I am dancing."

She was tripping lightly away when in the doorway she encountered Fontenoy.

"Good-night, my beloved uncle. The next time you present an aspirant for my hand, please tell him that *I* am the one he must make love to."

And she vanished.

"What does she mean by that?" asked Fon-

tenoy, coming and seating himself beside his wife.

"I can't say. I presume she thought your young cousin was not as attentive as he might have been," Edmée replied.

"Indeed," her husband gravely remarked. The look of disgust which had elicited such a comical simile from Juliette appeared again upon his face while he was thinking of Mme. Verseley, which brought a smile to his wife's lips. "Fabien is rich," he went on. "He is a very desirable match. Juliette will hardly do better. I hope no one will try to prejudice her against him."

"My friend, if my advice is asked, I say: 'Let her choose for herself,'" Edmée replied.

"You never said anything to lead me to believe that you entertained such opinions," said he, looking at her with surprise. "I thought, on the contrary, that you were not favorable to youthful attachments."

"Yes," she hesitatingly rejoined, "that is true—I did think so once—but now I am not so certain—"

"Indeed!—since when?"

She raised her candid eyes to her husband's face. "Since this evening, I believe. But really I cannot say for certain; it is an idea that came to me just now. Let us not hurry matters, my friend; there is plenty of time."

"As you please, my dear. Good-night."

He kissed her hand. She looked at the clock; the hand was at eleven.

“Are you going to your room?” she asked.

“No, I shall go to the club for a while. Good-night.” And he left her.

IV.

EDMÉE retired to her chamber and presently dismissed her maid. She loved that calm and silent hour which precedes slumber, when all the household is asleep, or ought to be. In its tranquil repose she had often contemplated her existence, with a sensation of pleased delight, with the satisfaction of being rich, surrounded by pretty and attractive things, by agreeable friends and pleasant acquaintances. That in which her life was deficient had not been an affliction to her in those days; rather was she tempted to rejoice in her unrestricted liberty, unfettered by any troublesome tie of love or motherhood. Since her day of weeping, these egotistic sensations had abandoned her; it no longer afforded her pleasure to think of those things which once had seemed so restful. Most of her thoughts of this description, after having fluttered round her for a while, like night-moths awakened by an approaching candle, had fallen and perished by the wayside. The memory of Juliette projected itself athwart this gray waste like a ray of sunshine struggling through an April shower. She was so fresh, so full of life, so original in her expressions, and withal,

viewing life and its affairs in such a practical light. Would the promise of her bright youth be succeeded by the achievement of a glorious maturity? That was a question that as yet Mme. Fontenoy had never asked herself. To establish her in life with a husband, rich, young, well-born and well-bred, was not that the utmost that could be done for her? And now, behold, this future had ceased to appear the only possible, the only desirable one. Whether or not there might be another and a better, Edmée could not say; but the one thing she felt certain of was that a young girl's happiness is not to be assured by this general programme, as if it were the fashion of a hat or of a gown.

That was doubtless the way in which Mme. Verseley had married—merely for the sake of marriage, without giving attention to the husband; for he could not have left her long in doubt as to his charms of mind and person; but likely enough, also, she had looked to him for nothing of that nature, wealth and social position sufficing amply for all her needs.

Mme. Fontenoy could not help feeling annoyed and disgusted at the thought of the sinuous undine in her shimmering sea-green gown. Juliette was right. Why did she receive such people? But having received them once she could not, in common decency, close her door against them. The best she could do was to see as little of them as possible. Without asking herself why, she felt it was not probable

that her husband would ask her to invite them again. But why had they been bidden to the feast of to-day? To celebrate a rupture? Strange that a wife's intervention should be sought in such a case! Truly queer things are done sometimes under cloak of the proprieties!

Mme. Fontenoy, although not exactly an optimist, was not addicted to stirring up the mud and slime that underlies the placid surface of society. Entertaining a preference for that which is clean and of good repute, she averted her eyes that they might be spared the sight of such disagreeable things as she met with in her daily walks. This was the course that she adopted now as regarded Mme. Verseley. To be quite logical, she should at the same time have dismissed Gilbert's image—but she did not do it.

Was he really afflicted by the neglect, or, to speak more plainly, by the desertion of that strange woman? Or was it merely an impulse of masculine pique? Mme. Fontenoy was well aware that her husband's conjugal obligations sat lightly on him; but being neither a prude nor a fool, she declined to consider a condition of affairs which it was best she should feign ignorance of, and which—thanks to her patience and indifference—she had really succeeded in ignoring; and this had proved of great advantage to her. Up to the present time the thought of her husband's flirtations had inspired in her a sentiment of contemptuous pity; and all at once, actuated by a new-born feeling of compas-

sion, she detected herself asking if he had not suffered. At the same time she was conscious of a sentiment of true and tender friendship—much deeper than ever she had imagined—for this volatile husband.

It was difficult to reconcile the idea of suffering with handsome Gilbert's external appearance—which was attractive still, though scarcely as trim and graceful as it once had been—or with his self-reliant air and his unalterable good humor. Mme. Fontenoy assured herself that it was really very kind of her to trouble her head about the matter and turned her thoughts elsewhere.

Fabien Malvois was a very good-looking young man, and appeared to be a good fellow, so far as that qualification was not inconsistent with the rigid impassibility demanded by the fashion of the time. Was he, too, about to succumb to Madame Verseley's wiles? Really, it would be too—Edmée pulled herself up short. Too what? What was it to her if that coquette saw fit to substitute Fabien for Gilbert? It seems that there are a great many subjects of reflection in this world that an honest woman must put aside if she wishes to retain her peace of mind and not offend her moral nicety! Edmée said to herself that the hour was late and she would do best to go to bed. She opened the door and listened. There was no sound to announce that her husband had returned. Besides, he almost always came in late and she scarcely

ever heard him. So she sought her couch and soon was sleeping soundly.

Fontenoy had not been near his club. He had intended to go there, but on finding himself in the street had suddenly experienced that imperative need of exercise that is familiar to those who are laboring under the stress of mental or physical suffering. A good long walk at a brisk pace, it is said, will cure a raging toothache; then why not an ache of the heart or of wounded vanity? And handsome Gilbert had an ache, he could not say just where.

Mme. Verseley had received him very well in the beginning, and for two or three months he had got on swimmingly. The entire comedy of flirtation had been enacted between them. The finished coquette had brought all her artifices into action, alternately attracting and repelling him—raising him to the seventh heaven of hope to-day only to cast him down into the black gulf of despair to-morrow—until at last, when that which was mere caprice had become real passion with him, the pretty viper had politely shown him the door, and told him that henceforth it would be closed against him. Then he had presented himself on her reception day, thus compelling her to receive him in presence of witnesses; and to show that he was master, had prevailed on Edmée to extend an invitation to the fair, certain that the woman would accept if for no other reason than not to displease her husband, who prided himself on having such

fine acquaintances, and would not have known what to make of a refusal.

It was with a sensation of malignant and ill-conditioned pleasure that she penned her note of acceptance; for she reflected that it would be a pleasure—and of the most exquisite—to sit down at table with her discarded admirer and give him to understand that he had ceased to please, while he was powerless to display his rage and jealousy. Not that Mme. Verseley was altogether bad at heart; but she had a weakness for the sensational and for those life dramas in which her part was attended with no danger. An ardent pursuer of emotions, this was one that she looked forward to with pleasurable anticipations.

Gilbert had suffered that evening more than he would have cared to tell, more than he knew himself. There was a terrible conflict of wounded vanity and disappointed passion raging in his being. The sentiment that he had experienced for the woman was not very profound, neither was it very elevated, but still he had loved her after a fashion, and feeling that he had done nothing to merit the treatment she accorded him, he was naturally indignant. Fontenoy was certainly not a fool, but when love takes possession of us it would seem that a certain modicum of folly enters by the same door—and generally departs at the same time. For the moment he was as impatient as a young man prosecuting his first adventure. A night's rest would doubtless cause him to view matters in a different light. He saw where the truth

lay, and lectured himself, reasoned with himself, but to no purpose; the intolerable ache persisted in returning.

With head down and hands thrust deep into the pockets of his overcoat, he strode onward through the storm of mingled snow and rain that lashed his face, heedless alike of the inclemency of the weather and the lateness of the hour. Suddenly he became conscious of a terrible sensation of heat and constriction clutching at his throat. He looked around him for a vehicle of some sort to take him home. He saw that he was on the Place Pereire, where the gaslights were shining brightly on the deserted sidewalks, only a few steps from his house. For hours, unconsciously to himself, he had been walking in a narrow circle whose center was his own dwelling. An icy chill shook his body, while the fierce heat in his head was that of a conflagration. He endeavored to hasten his steps, but it seemed as if his nerveless legs would give way beneath his weight. When at last he had reached his house and after laborious effort climbed the steps, he hunted a long time for his key, opened the door and entered. The staircase appeared to him to have no end. At top, in the hot, intolerably close atmosphere, he found his valet—who should have been watching—sound asleep. The light of the gas hurt his eyes and caused him a strange sensation of nausea. He submitted to be undressed and dismissed the domestic, acting on an impulse similar to that of the wounded animal, which seeks

a refuge where it can suffer in secret, unseen of its kind. Scarcely had he touched the bed when he sank into a sort of lethargy.

Mme. Fontenoy was a light sleeper. Some time after she had retired, she was awakened abruptly by distant sounds that frightened her. What were they? Shouts, cries, groans? She could not distinguish clearly. The noise appeared to reach her through the little drawing-room. Edmée was no coward. Had there been any one by to see the idea that a crime was being committed within a few steps of her would have scared her out of her senses, that being the effect that is expected from every well-bred woman. At that hour, and in the silence and solitude of the night, she did not hesitate a moment. By the dim light of the night-lamp she hastily slipped on a peignoir and made for the door.

The only light in the empty drawing-room was that which straggled faintly through the blinds from the gas-lamps which flared and flickered in the gusts that swept the street. The sounds proceeded from Fontenoy's bedroom. At the threshold she stopped for a moment hesitating. For many years she had not passed that door except to give the room the vigilant attention of the housewife. Even should Gilbert be in real peril, would not her entrance be regarded as an intrusion? A sound as of some one choking dispelled her uncertainty. Her husband was there—was suffering. She entered.

A candle was burning on the table. Its dim light enabled Mme. Fontenoy to discern the congested condition of her husband's face. His breathing was momentarily becoming more stertorous and labored. With rare presence of mind for a woman unversed in the practical details of life she threw the window wide open, then rang for the valet de chambre and dispatched him for a doctor.

When one knows nothing, can do nothing, and is brought face to face with an emergency when life and death hang in the balance, and a second's delay may prove fatal, the minutes are long and full of anguish. The servant had employed the usual methods to revive his master, placing wet towels on his head, rubbing his temples with eau de Cologne; then, finding that his efforts met with no success, had prudently retired to avoid being summoned as a witness in case Fontenoy should die. The window had remained open. Feeling herself chilled, Edmée rose and closed it, then returned and resumed her seat beside the bed where her husband lay panting, his labored respiration resounding through the apartment with the measured cadence of a blacksmith's bellows.

Was he going to lie there and die, and was there no help for it? Of what avail was all their wealth then? So long as he had not had need of anything, his lot had seemed as enviable as that of the most fortunate. Now he was no better off than the poorest laborer, than the homeless vagrant who throws himself down in

the gutter to die. Nay, the vagrant had the advantage, for a policeman would probably come along and pick him up.

The noise of doors opened and closed resounded through the silent house. Edmée raised her head. It was the servant returning with a physician; not Fontenoy's family doctor, who lived at too great a distance, but a district physician whose name was kept with others on a slate at the police station. The rich man, Fontenoy, was to receive the same assistance as any poor needy devil; but it mattered little, so long as the assistance was there.

The valet de chambre had come back now that there was some one to share his responsibility with him.

"Let me have two claret glasses and some cotton ravelings, and be quick about it," said the doctor, who was young and quick of speech and movement.

The required articles were long in making their appearance. We have all had experience how things hide away and will not be found when needed in a big house where there is a crowd of servants. The keys of the office could not be had until some functionary was awakened. At last the glasses came. Assisted by Edmée, for the domestics were utterly incapable of rendering any help, the doctor cupped Fontenoy on the chest.

The wife had never witnessed an operation of that nature. It seemed to her cruel. When she saw the skin rise in a great blister and

partly fill the glass she could hardly refrain from uttering a cry of horror.

"Let's have no hysterics, if you please, madame," the physician curtly said; "or if you are going to give way to them, leave the room. This man will assist me."

"No, I will assist, monsieur," she replied, recovering her self-control by a violent effort and without feeling offended by the stranger's unceremonious manner of addressing her.

Other cuppings followed; Fontenoy's breathing became less labored; at last he opened his eyes, but closed them again immediately. A moment later he inhaled a deep breath and his eyelids rose very slowly, as if he were taking his first look at the world of the living.

"That is well," said the doctor. "Don't speak, don't move; keep perfectly still."

He changed the position of his patient, raising him so that he might breathe more easily.

"Get more pillows," he said to Edmée. "His head must be kept higher than it is."

Mme. Fontenoy obediently went and took the pillows from her bed and helped to place them under the others. Then she waited to see what would happen. The clock struck five.

"You will have to sit by him for the rest of the night, madam," the doctor calmly said. "It won't be long, though, for it is nearly daylight now. You will see that he has the draught which I will send. I will stop and arouse the druggist on my way home. You would receive it too late if you should wait

and send one of your servants. I shall return at nine o'clock. Let there be no noise, nothing to excite the patient—perfect silence. You understand, madame! I have the honor to bid you good-morning.”

He left the room, his shoulders somewhat bowed, like a man accustomed to sustain the burdens of life. He appeared to be nowise astonished by the magnificence of the suite through which he passed: According to his way of looking at things, in the condition he had found Fontenoy in, one man is not so very different from another, and the effect produced by the cupping on the rich man's skin was exactly the same as if the treatment had been employed on a pauper.

Mme. Fontenoy remained seated beside her husband, utterly at sea and unable to arrange her thoughts. She could hardly bring herself to believe that it was he, lying there on that bed, with that swollen, distorted face, whose eyes no longer had the expression that she had always known there. Still less could she believe that it was she in that room, where, for seventeen years, she had never once sat down—she, acting as her husband's nurse. It all seemed to her like a horrid nightmare. The house was again wrapped in silence: the valet de chambre had taken himself off to bed, the other servants were not risen yet, not a sound was to be heard in the tranquil street. The ticking of the clock marked the flight of time in imperious, jerky accents. Edmée's mind was strangely

lucid. She was conscious of no fatigue resulting from the occurrences of the night; but rather a sort of tranquil superexcitation, if the two words may be thus conjoined—a state of mind and body that resembled a permanent action, and which she would gladly have prolonged, for it was not without its charm.

For a moment she had feared that she was never to see the light of her husband's eyes again. With the rapidity of insight that characterizes those moments of storm and darkness, she had asked herself what her feelings would be should she suddenly find herself left a widow; and the answer had been that her grief would be deep and sincere.

While deftly passing the small bits of lighted paper to the doctor she had been reflecting on the important place in her social, and even in her material life, which was occupied by that husband, who, she had believed, was nothing more than a polite and well-bred table-companion. She felt that even under those circumstances he had been a protector and companion to her. She had a vivid glimpse of what existence would be when she should no longer have his company, either at table or in the world, when the duty of correcting and, at need, discharging the servants would devolve on her; when she—an indolent and helpless woman—should be burdened with the ordering of a luxurious and expensive household; and she had recoiled from the prospect, exclaiming: “Oh, no! not that—not that!”

It seemed probable now that Fontenoy would

live. She tried to assure herself he would. She made a more thorough exploration of the recesses of her mind, and was surprised by what she found there. She discovered that she really loved him, this tried and trusty friend, her companion of twenty years. Who could have believed that circumstances in themselves so unimportant as bearing the same name, inhabiting the same house, sitting at the same table either as hosts or guests, could introduce so much real warmth of feeling into relations apparently so strained?

Then the thought of her ruined life came back to her again. Did he care for her at all? Was he capable of reciprocating her cordial feeling, of participating in the generous impulse of her affection? She raised her eyes and gave him a sorrowful look, as if asking him the question, and blushed like one detected in wrong-doing. He had opened his eyes, and they were bent on her with a singular expression, almost of fear.

“'Sh!” said she, raising her hand in warning. “You are doing very well, my friend; don't stir!”

The expression of Fontenoy's face showed that he was in pain. He motioned feebly toward his chest.

“It is to make you well, my friend. You must suffer and have patience, my poor Gilbert. But don't alarm yourself; it is nothing—nothing at all!”

She spoke such words as came to her to cheer

and comfort him, as she would have spoken to a sick child. He understood the expression of her voice and smile, closed his eyes again and lay without motion, resignedly enduring the salutary pain that told of returning life.

When the doctor returned at the appointed hour, he found M. and Mme. Fontenoy as he had left them. Without calling for the assistance of a servant he parted the curtains and threw back the shutters. The room was immediately inundated with the clear morning light. Without, the sun was shining brightly from a cloudless sky upon the coating of snow that had fallen during the night and covered streets and housetops. He examined his patient and declared himself satisfied with his condition.

“What doctor does your husband generally employ?” he asked Edmée.

She mentioned an illustrious name. He puckered his lips in a grimace of admiration to indicate that he knew the cost of such attendance.

“Well, you had better send for him now. Tell him it is the district physician who is responsible for the treatment so far. Here is my card in case there should be any question.”

Edmée rose with a start. It was to that stranger that she was indebted for her husband's life. She tried to tell him so; he stopped her.

“It is what we are paid for, madame. It is for cases like this that our names are kept for reference at the stations. Your fine gentlemen of

the Institute won't respond to night calls. They show themselves when we have brought their patients back to life. They are right enough, though. I would do as they do if I were rich."

He bowed and was walking away. Edmée followed him into the drawing-room.

"Have you any children, sir?" she asked.

"Three," he gruffly answered.

"You are fortunate," she gently said; "they are what gives one courage to labor—and the desire to live."

He looked at her in surprise, but not knowing what reply to make, bowed again and left the house.

The medical celebrity who was intrusted with the charge of Fontenoy's health came in to look at him in the course of the day, and as he was not only a great doctor, but also a very decent man, he gave the sanction of his approval to the treatment of his obscurer colleague. With surprise not unmingled with some respect, he learned that Edmée had spent her night in watching at her husband's bedside, and in a few sincere words applauded her devotion. As Fontenoy could not be left alone, and the valet had given abundant proof of his inefficiency, it was determined that a trained nurse should be called in for the night.

Edmée sent immediately to all those places where there was a likelihood of finding what she needed, but it so chanced that Paris was at that time being ravaged by an epidemic of influenza. Nowhere could be found man or

woman capable of assuming the responsibility. Trained nurses and Sisters of Charity alike, all were at their patients' bedsides and could not leave them.

“Truly,” Edmée reflected, “money can do very little! It would have been powerless to keep my husband from dying last night had fate so willed, and now our entire fortune will not relieve me from the task of watching again to-night, exactly as if I were the wife of a common laborer. Well, I don’t know that I am so very sorry, after all! When he gets well, if he remembers it, he will have a kindlier feeling for me, and if—if he should die, I shall be glad to think I did it!”

Notwithstanding her new-born contempt for money, Mme. Fontenoy remembered that those who are not so well supplied with the commodity are generally not averse to receiving it. She put a five hundred franc note in an envelope and sent it round to the station-house for the district physician. She would gladly have made the sum twice as great, but dared not for fear lest she might offend him by a generosity too closely resembling charity. Her heart lay lightly in her bosom, and she would have been pleased that others should share her joy.

V.

FONTENOY was picking up rapidly and making decided progress toward recovery. After two long weary days, and two more nights, during which his wife, not venturing in her inexperience of the sick-chamber to give way to her desire for slumber, had taken her rest in cat-naps, he was slowly returning to the land of the living. He took a little nourishment, was conscious of his condition, complaining in particular of severe pains in his back, and began to have some remembrance of what had happened. He was not allowed to see any one as yet, although the door-bell was constantly resounding with the ring of those who called to inquire and leave their cards.

One evening toward nine o'clock Gilbert, his eyes wide open, was staring about him as if trying to memorize the contents of the room. Edmée had gone down to dinner and, busied with the innumerable details of her household, which she had neglected during the past few days, had not yet returned. Fontenoy's gaze rested on his secretary—a magnificent specimen of old buhl standing between two windows—with an intensity that seemed as if it would pierce its sides. Several times he was on the point of speaking to his valet, who was moving noiselessly about the apartment arranging things

in readiness for the night, but each time he refrained. At last he came to a decision and curtly asked:

“My keys?”

The servant gave a start of surprise at the sound of his voice, but answered almost immediately: “Monsieur’s keys are on the bureau, where monsieur left them.”

“Bring them here.”

The servant obeyed. Fontenoy’s fingers closed over the little bunch and he shut his eyes. A moment later Edmée entered the room. She asked a question or two of the valet in a low voice and then came forward to her husband, a bright smile of encouragement on her lips. The saying has been repeated until it is threadbare: “Every woman is at heart a mother.” It is quite certain that at that moment Edmée considered her husband in the light of a trust confided to her care by Providence with the sole intent that she should watch over him and nurse him back to health. The servant silently retired, and she went and seated herself on the edge of her reclining chair, near the lamp, where her book was awaiting her with a bit of red ribbon between the leaves to mark her place. A moment later she heard herself called.

“Edmée!” said Fontenoy.

It was the first time since his accident that he had spoken without being addressed. She rose at once and went over to him. Her noble, erect form seemed to glide over the carpet rather than

walk, with a motion of perfect grace and majesty.

"Edmée," said he, "will you do me a favor?"

He spoke quite distinctly, although his enunciation was somewhat thick, and the light of intelligence shone in his eyes. His wife's heart was glad within her to see him, as it were, thus risen from the dead.

"Name it and it shall be done," she joyously replied.

He handed her the bunch of keys, from among which his trembling fingers had vainly tried to extricate that of the secretary. He pointed it out to her.

"A drawer," he explained.

She was already standing by the desk.

"Which one?"

"The third one to the—"

He tried to remember the word "left." Not succeeding, he raised that hand. She understood. She opened the secretary and pulled out the drawer.

"Here!" said Fontenoy.

Forthwith she brought it over to the bed. He nodded his head in approval of each of her movements.

The drawer contained a number of small packages of letters, all carefully tied together with ribbons of different colors—letters from women, evidently. Why do men, even the least romantic of them, persist in keeping those things? Edmée thought it a very inane proceeding. Who knows? Perhaps her own letters, the

few she had ever written him during the infrequent occasions of her absence from him for a little while, were there among the rest. He gave her an entreating look.

“Dear Edmée, please—into the fire, all of them!”

She was thrilled through all her being by an impulse made up of mingled pride and anger. He must entertain a very good opinion of her, then, thus to place in her hands, the hands of his lawful wife, that which represented the honor, or the semblance of honor, of his loves of bygone days? Or did he esteem his wife so lightly that he judged her incapable of guessing at the truth? She looked him in the face, trying to decide which was the correct hypothesis; and, meantime, her fingers were tightly clinched over the sides of the frail receptacle that contained so much history of the past and so much tribulation for the future, if she so willed it. He read in her eyes what was passing in her mind; not the whole, perhaps, but enough to move him deeply. But he knew her well, that loyal and upright wife of his, better than he had supposed, infinitely better than she had any suspicion of. He knew that she was not an angel, endowed with supernatural gifts, but simply an honest mortal, incapable of committing a mean action.

“Please, into the fire with them!” he said, in the faint, almost unaccented voice with which his illness had left him.

She walked slowly over to the fireplace, and there, with a finely dramatic gesture, such a one as the priestesses of old might have employed, emptied the drawer upon the flames, not even touching the contents with her hand.

"I wonder if Mme. Verseley's letters are there?" she asked herself, as the little perfumed packages went tumbling down among the ashes of which they would soon be part. "She is not the kind of woman to write letters!" she immediately replied.

She placed the empty drawer upon the mantelpiece, took up the tongs, and presently a bright blaze flamed up, illuminating her face and sending its dancing lights over to the bed where Gilbert lay propped up on his pillows, his eyes fixed intently on the conflagration. Edmée stirred the glowing mass until there was not a scrap of white paper left, then gave the logs a parting blow that set the sparks flying, and came back to her husband, saying:

"That's done."

"Thanks!" he replied, in a low voice and rather sheepishly.

She was afraid that he might be too effusive in his acknowledgments. It seemed to her that it would be embarrassing and rather ill-timed, and she turned away from him to escape his display of gratitude. Hearing nothing further, she could not help giving him a look. He had closed his eyes and seemed to be dozing, whereon she was conscious of a feeling of disappointment that she had not received what she felt she so

richly deserved—a word of praise, a look of thankfulness.

“Bah!” she said to herself, “when do we ever get our deserts?”

Edmée returned to her book, a little sad at heart, reflecting that Mme. Verseley, had she been in her place, would doubtless have acted differently. An hour passed. The silence was complete. Fontenoy's breathing even was only audible when she lent her closest attention. Edmée continued her reading, but the words had no meaning for her. She was thinking of a multitude of things as she turned the leaves of her book: of her girlhood, the early days of her marriage, the gradually increasing alienation that had succeeded, and the long period of moral separation that came after. It was at that time that her husband began to assert his independence and indulge in flirtations, flirtations which now were dead, reduced to ashes and cast to the winds of heaven, like the bits of blackened paper that had once been love-letters, and that now, drawn up the chimney, were fluttering about the neighborhood and falling in the mud of the street, there to be trampled under horses' hoofs!

“Ah, how little it all amounts to!” she sighed, dropping upon her lap the hands that held the book. “Of all those women who professed to love him there is not one who would to-day care to watch by his bedside for an hour. The task is left to me. Yes, but I am his wife.”

A look of pardonable pride rose to the soft

golden-brown eyes, and Mme. Fontenoy raised her head to a more erect posture. Then, in a mirror facing her, she beheld her own face. She saw herself in the lamplight, which imparted to her complexion luminous tones of ivory and gold. The charming oval of her pretty face, the chestnut hair which formed for it a frame so nobly pure, the rich curve of the lips that needed no cosmetic to insure their redness, the delicately shaped ear, which with its trembling dewdrop of a diamond awakened memories of pink shells of ocean— She saw that at thirty-eight she was fresh, unfatigued, and fair to look upon; far younger in looks than most of her more juvenile acquaintances, made prematurely old by the use of paints and dyes.

“It is surely my reflection that I am looking at,” she said to herself; “and yet of what advantage are my good looks to me?”

She smiled, however, with faint irony. What advantage? Yes, truly! And yet she felt that she would prefer to be as she was rather than be otherwise.

Fontenoy no longer required to be watched as closely as he had been. A bell placed within his reach would enable him to summon the servant who was to replace Edmée, and would be within call in the adjoining dressing-room. After having made sure that everything was as it should be, and that her husband was sleeping, or feigning to do so, she retired to her apartment.

Only three days had elapsed since she left her room to come to Gilbert's assistance. Standing once again at the foot of her own bed the interval seemed to her to be of months, or, at all events, of weeks. The invasion of her ordinarily uneventful life in this summary manner by so many startling incidents and impressions was calculated to make her thoughtful. While making her toilet for the night, she reviewed those three days, hour by hour and minute by minute, and suddenly this reflection occurred to her:

"It was because he thought he was about to die that my husband made me burn his papers. If I were to die, is there anything I should wish not to leave behind me?"

She ransacked her memory and could think of nothing. Then she likewise unlocked *her* little desk, in which, together with her jewels, she kept the trifling objects that served to remind her of her past.

There were a few letters from friends of her girlhood—those eminently decorous and uninteresting productions that young ladies of sixteen or seventeen delight in exchanging—some relics of her father and mother, gifts from her husband, and three letters from him, dating back to the period of their engagement.

She was closing the drawer with a sigh that was part pity, part contempt for the poor trumpery, when she changed her mind and took out Gilbert's letters in order to give them another reading.

The sight of the handwriting, now faded and yellow after the lapse of many years, inspired in her a profound emotion. She feared she should cry over the missives, and was about to return them to their receptacle unread; but she plucked up courage and perused them all from beginning to end.

What could she have ever seen in them to excite in her the transports that they had done twenty years ago? Verily, it required the imagination of a girl of eighteen to discern that those correctly phrased and properly punctuated sheets were love-letters! It was quite true that the proprieties did not admit of Gilbert's laying bare his soul in burning effusions; but real tenderness would illuminate the bottom of a well, and in those lucubrations there was neither tenderness nor passion. The most that could be said for them was that they demonstrated him to be a person of correct literary taste, and showed that he liked her a little better than other girls.

Impelled by a sensation of feminine anger and mortification, Edmée made for the fireplace. The letters of the *fiancé* were about to share the fate of those of the husband's pretty friends; but she curbed herself and restored the gayly decorated portfolio to its resting-place.

"If I should die before he does," she said to herself, "let him find them there and read them. It will be his punishment if he ever thinks of what he made me do this night."

She closed the desk, got into bed, and soon

was enjoying the refreshing slumber of one who has watched three nights.

VI.

“WHAT an uncle! Oh, what an uncle! I have no use for such an uncle! I want my uncle Gilbert to waltz with me at the commencement of the ball, and take me home at its close.”

Seated on a low chair, Juliette was critically eyeing her uncle Gilbert, who appeared not to have paid extremely dear for his experience. There were a few threads of silver in his beard, which had attained quite a length, and his head was more frosted than it had been; but he really made a very presentable appearance for a man returning from such a journey.

“You will give an entertainment, uncle, if you please—an entertainment, with dancing, in celebration of your recovery.”

“Oh, no; not with dancing,” Edmée smilingly replied. “We should have to take up the carpets, and that is a thing that has never been done in this house.”

“They shall be taken up, my dear aunt. Don’t you send your precious carpets away to be shaken in the spring and put them down again in the autumn? Well, you will give your party when your carpets are up—the week before the Grand Prix. That’s my royal pleasure. You must know that I have taken the notion

in my head that there has got to be a dance here, and I have promised little Descrosses there should be. He wants a chance to lead a farandole on a huge scale—one that will reach from the laundry 'way downstairs to the kitchen. So! as my nurse used to say when I was little. You know my will, aunt."

"We'll see about it," Mme. Fontenoy placidly replied. "What do you make of your little Descrosses nowadays?"

"That is a society game, auntie, adapted to young ladies' boarding-schools. What do you make of him, where do you put him? Do you know that the more improper a thing is the funnier it is? But don't be alarmed; I'm not going to be improper, or, at least, not very. What do I make of him? Nothing—less than nothing. What could you expect a young woman to make of a briefless lawyer who can't get the judges to listen to him?"

"Juliette!" Edmée exclaimed; "I assure you that if people heard you—"

"If people heard me? Ah, my dear aunt, that's just it. They do hear me. I have the awfully bad habit of thinking out loud, so you can imagine! And to think that I do it even in the street! I was walking with Miss Lane on the Boulevard Malesherbes the other day. I hadn't anything very particular to say, and yet I was thinking out loud—not so *very* loud—and to Miss Lane! You can see that it couldn't have been anything very particular, for she couldn't have understood me. Well,

there were two gentlemen walking behind us. They followed us as far as the Parc Monceau—listening, of course. Did you ever hear of such impertinence! So I kept making my little reflections in a general way, and they probably thought I was referring to them, for they disappeared in the park. It was well for them they did!”

Gilbert laughed. His return to life had brought with it a fresh fund of good-humor and even of mental youthfulness, as is apt to be the case when circumstances beyond our control banish us from the world for a time and force us to live more simply.

“If you don’t mend your ways, Juliette,” observed Mme. Fontenoy, “we shall have a hard time of it to find you a husband!”

“Do you really think so, my darling aunt?” the young girl airily asked, wheeling round upon her chair to bring herself facing Edmée.

She was altogether delicious, with her glossy, fine black hair, that curled as naturally and was as lustrous as that of the Louisiana creoles. Her eyes were not very large, but they sparkled with animation and shone with the brilliancy of black diamonds; while her mischievous smile, that brought one corner of her mouth down slightly lower than the other, imparted to her countenance a particularly alluring charm. Edmée smiled too and made no further answer. With that face and a dowry of a million it would not be so very hard to arrange a match for her, after all.

"By the way, uncle," said the irrepressible maiden, turning to Fontenoy, "I have seen your protégé again."

"My protégé?"

"Yes, certainly. Fabien Malvois the good-looking. Aren't you the man who has it in charge to find a wife for him?"

"I don't know that I am—particularly."

"Oh, very well, then! that's the talk among the girls, though. You needn't be angry, although it *does* give you somewhat of a—of a grandfatherly air to fill the position of bear-leader. You are hardly old enough yet for that function; but that's the talk, I do assure you."

"You say that you have seen him again?" asked Edmée. She felt that it was not safe to go too far in chaffing Gilbert, whose temper was not always to be relied on.

"I should rather say I had! During uncle's illness I went out several times. It was mamma's sister-in-law, the dreadfully tiresome one—you know her, don't you, Aunt Edmée?—well, it was she who chaperoned me. You may be sure that I will always give you the preference, and will never try to beat you down in salary. Three times I was in houses where there was dancing, and three times I met handsome Fabien."

"What did he say to you?" inquired Gilbert, who felt an interest in the young man.

"He said to me: 'Don't you think, mademoiselle, that Mme. Fontenoy's dinner was a great success?' "

“He had to say something to begin with,” Edmée charitably remarked.

“I never said he hadn’t, auntie; only, you know me! His observation called for an answer.”

“You make me shudder!” said Gilbert with a laugh. “And what may have been your answer?”

“‘Yes, sir; but the greatest success of all was Mme. Verseley’s gown.’”

“Oh!” Edmée ejaculated in a tone of consternation, while Fontenoy dropped his eyes and intently scrutinized the pattern of the carpet.

“You will see that he is not wanting in presence of mind. He looked me in the face, and asked me, very calmly: ‘I believe Felix makes her gowns, doesn’t he?’”

“Good!” said Mme. Fontenoy, who had had time to regain her self-possession. “You deserved it.”

“Yes, my dear aunt, I admit that,” Juliette declared with evident satisfaction. “But you must own that such a conversation is not commonplace, and goes a great way toward making up for the stupidity of a quadrille. That was what happened the first time. The second time he said to me: ‘What a great blessing the electric light has proved. Before we had it, one couldn’t dance with any comfort on account of the heat; and now one might almost say that the room is actually cool.’ That was while we were waltzing. I took it for a compliment; for you have waltzed with me, haven’t you, uncle?”

and you know I am as light on my feet as a little bird. Then I smiled very sweetly and asked him if he could skate. There's repartee for you, auntie! Come, have a little indulgence for the poor candidate who is doing her best to pass a good examination."

"And the third time?"

"Oh, the third time the ice was broken and we got on famously. Until something new happens we are the best friends in the world."

"Why do you say until something happens?" Mme. Fontenoy asked.

"Because things can't go on as they are going. They are moving too smoothly. Folks will think I am going to marry him."

"Where would be the harm in that, and why shouldn't you marry him?" asked Gilbert.

"Why should I? I know no more of him than I do of the rest of them; and not such a great deal less, it's true." She was silent, and her pretty face became almost serious. Presently she went on: "When I was a little girl I used to have the queerest notions about marriage. Perhaps you imagine that it appeared to me in the light of a sacrament? Not a bit of it! It always made me think of a great ball-room with an enormous chandelier. The married couples waltzed around under the chandelier, and that was marriage. After they got through dancing they were to live together all the remainder of their lives. Well, I've given the subject a good deal of thought since then, and that's not the way of it all. And there are

lots of girls who think that that is all there is to it, or pretty nearly all. A round of little entertainments, the dinner to celebrate the engagement, the big ball at the signing of the contract, and the nuptial mass at a fashionable church to wind up with—my waltz under the chandelier, you know! Only we don't dance any more nowadays. The rites are conducted to the sound of music. That's pretty much the way of it, I admit; but there's something else!"

"What?" asked Fontenoy.

"That part about living together all their lives. For it wouldn't look well for the couple to admit there was a possibility of their suing each other for a divorce some day, would it now? I don't mean to deny that it may happen, but it is not to be regarded as a necessary accompaniment of the marriage. Very well, then. You see that the two ideas, dancing under the chandelier and living together forever after, don't harmonize. There is incompatibility, as little Descrosses would say."

"What is your friend Descrosses's Christian name?" Gilbert inquired, thinking it high time that the conversation should be changed to some less risky topic.

"I don't know. Nobody knows. Those who are intimate with him call him Little Decrosses; others just address him as Descrosses. It is not his fault. There are dogs that have no other name than Tonton. That's not their fault, either."

"She is astonishing!" exclaimed Gilbert,

throwing himself back among his cushions with an exhausted air, as if Juliette's chatter had brought on the pains in his back again.

The young girl rose.

"I must tear myself away," she said, regretfully. "I'm going to give my royal highness an airing, so that she may look bright and fresh this evening; for there is another dance again to-night, auntie. My fifth new gown this winter! It is lucky that Lent is so near at hand. Take good care of yourselves, both of you. I hold you in the highest respect and consideration, my dear uncle and aunt; but, for all that, you are much younger than I."

Whereon she made them a sweeping, old-time courtesy and left the room.

"Happy age!" said Fontenoy.

"Happy nature!" replied his wife.

He heaved a sigh, and appeared to be absorbed in contemplating the glowing embers.

VII.

FONTENOY's recovery appeared to be complete. The only evidence remaining of the great shock he had received was a slightly increased gravity of demeanor, a somewhat diminished fluency of speech. His friends had not been allowed to know the peril he was in. Edmée had given out that he was suffering from a severe cold, and Gilbert had approved her judicious course and thanked her for it.

“They would not stop short of saying that I had lost my mind and become a driveling idiot,” he said.

But if his outer appearance was nearly the same, the moral man had undergone a change. When we have been hovering for days in succession on the confines of the unexplored realm of darkness, there remains to us a sort of mysterious horror, a terrified bewilderment, as after a vision, and we regard life with a respect which we never felt before. Even when he had rounded the buoy and was commencing his return voyage from that dread country, the remotest that our mind can conceive of, recovering his faculty of thought at the same time as his perception of physical suffering, he had believed that it was all over with him. That was the day when he asked Edmée to burn his papers. She—who was but a woman—could not divine what that request had cost so brave a man as Fontenoy; but it had left him in a sadly shaken state. A few words from his doctor—short, but to the point—had served to complete the metamorphosis.

“Men have no sense,” said the great man. “They want to remain young too long, and sooner or later they pay for their folly. You should consider yourself fortunate to have escaped this time with a warning. You may live many years yet and be hale and vigorous; but to do it you must bear in mind that a man at fifty is not the same as a man at twenty-five. If you choose to forget it, a second attack of this nature may prove extremely dangerous. I

have spoken plainly and given you fair warning."

Fontenoy was attached to life, and to preserve it, felt himself capable of modifying the conditions of his existence since it was necessary to do so. He was a man of refined tastes. He had no real vices and maintained none for the sake of ostentation; hence, it would be easier for him than for many another man to obey directions, which, after all, did not tax his fortitude very heavily. To go to bed a little earlier, to eat a little less heartily; these are only trifling sacrifices, and Fontenoy submitted to them with good grace.

He was somewhat surprised to see how readily his wife adapted herself to this new way of living. He had thought she was fond of society; and so she was, indeed, but simply from habit, not because she craved it. What can a woman do, alone in a big house, with no children to look after, and whose husband spends all his evenings away from home? In her friends' drawing-rooms she finds acquaintances to converse with, and if here and there she picks up a crumb of real friendship that is so much clear gain for her. Why should she not avail herself of this agreeable way of killing time?

To kill time! That is the chief occupation of those who, thanks to their wealth, are blessed with such opportunities to use it to advantage. The fortunate ones of this world rise when the day is half ended and go to bed as others are commencing their daily toil, and from the mo-

ment of their rising until they seek their couch their one single object is to get rid of the minutes that lie between them and death.

That was not Edmée's case, however. In company with a number of intelligent women, she belonged to various societies of a literary and charitable nature, that served to occupy her afternoons occasionally. Furthermore, she could endure with equanimity the prospect of being left alone of an evening with a book or a review, and this was the means of affording her husband an extremely agreeable surprise when he found himself compelled to stick more closely to his fireside.

However, after a few weeks of a sort of semi-inactivity, he experienced a desire to resume his position in that world where one so quickly becomes an object of pity, then of contempt, a species of social castaway as it were, if he fails to keep in the swim. Two or three dinner parties announced that his convalescence was at an end. It fatigued him less to have people come to him than it did to go to them, so he resolved to entertain more than he had done in the past; and, in this, too, he found his wife ready to second him.

One day in April he received a visit from Fabien Malvois, who, with the most solicitous attention, had been assiduous in inquiring after his health, and, later on, in calling. After the usual salutations the good-looking young man proceeded to enlighten his host as to the reason of his present proceeding. He desired to know

what his chances would be if he should enter the field as a suitor for the hand of Mdlle. Juliette Chassagny. Her appearance pleased him; he had found her intelligent and charming; they were on an equality in point of fortune; he was ready to put in his proposal if there seemed to be a prospect of its being considered favorably.

"Surely you can have no serious doubt of that?" said Fontenoy.

Fabien hesitated a moment.

"I don't think that Mdlle. Juliette regards me with disfavor," said he; "but you know her much better than I do. I cannot tell, under the mask of animation and liveliness that she uses to conceal her real thoughts, whether she has a liking for me or whether she simply looks on me as an agreeable partner—"

"Perhaps you are a little exacting," said Gilbert, with a smile. "It is often the case with young ladies that they merely await a favorable opportunity of manifesting their sentiments; and then, too, we are not so romantic as we used to be—do you think we are? I don't see but what the match, so far as you are both concerned, would be a most suitable one. Speaking for myself, I should be delighted to see it arranged. Would you like that I should speak to my wife?"

"I should be ever so much obliged."

Chance was propitious and afforded Fontenoy an opportunity of redeeming his promise without much delay. That same day, after they had dined, having spent the two preceding even-

ings in attendance on social functions and not feeling like going out again, he announced his intention of remaining at home; whereon his wife instructed her maid to put away the gown and ornaments that the abigail had taken from their resting-place.

“So, my dear,” he smilingly said, “you don’t object to our spending the evening together by the fireside, like the old married couple that we are? Are you quite certain that you won’t be bored?”

“So far as I am concerned I have no fears. Our absence won’t please Juliette very well. She always wishes to stay till the end, and knows that she can depend on me to humor her; but it will be quite as well for her if her other aunt takes her home a little earlier than usual.”

While speaking Edmée had risen and got her work-basket, and was selecting skeins of variously colored wool.

“What are you making there?” asked her husband.

“Oh, things for poor people: socks and knitted petticoats. Not very handsome, but nice and warm.”

“That is a capital idea and a good action. You were speaking of Juliette just now. Don’t you think it is about time we were thinking of providing her with a husband?”

As Edmée did not answer Fontenoy continued:

“Malvois was here to-day to have a talk with

me. He is ready to propose. He is not objectionable to you, I think?"

"I do not object to him," said Edmée, taking up her long ivory crochet needle.

"Well, is that all? He is an excellent match. The alliance will be most suitable. He has wealth, education, good looks, good temper, everything. Have you nothing to say?"

"I am compelled to give my assent to all you say, my friend. He has everything."

"Very good. If that's the way you feel about the matter, will you speak to your sister?"

Deliberately Edmée laid her work down upon her lap and answered:

"No."

Greatly surprised, her husband looked at her attentively and became aware that the look she exhibited on her face at that moment was one he had never seen there before.

"No? And why not?" said he.

"My friend, I beg you will not take offense at what I am about to say. After a union of twenty years, it would be inexcusable in me to rake up old sores or attempt to raise fresh difficulties. You are a gentleman, and a friend for whom, believe me, I entertain a very real and sincere attachment; but has it occurred to you that when we were married our situation and prospects were almost identically the same as those of Juliette and your young friend?"

He nodded his head in assent to her proposition.

"Well, my friend, I should hate to see

Juliette, twenty years hence, in the mental condition that I am in to-day."

"Have we not been happy together?" asked Fontenoy, but with a sort of mental reservation that made him feel a little uneasy.

"I suppose, and am glad to believe that you have been. As for me, candor compels me to answer: No."

"Why—but you have never allowed me to suspect—"

Edmée smiled, with just the faintest indication of satisfied pride. "Of course; and if we were not now—not man and wife, but old friends who can talk to each other, I hope, with perfect frankness, I should have never said a word to you of this; but inasmuch as your questions have a bearing on Juliette's case, I owe you a straightforward answer: 'I wish my niece to be happier than I have been, and I don't want to see her marry under the same conditions that prevailed at my marriage.'"

"But what has been wanting to insure your happiness?"

"Very little: only love."

"Oh, come, my dear, you don't mean that! You are aware with what sincere affection—"

"Yes, my friend, I know. You have loved me as much as you could, and as the opinion of the world demanded; but it was not love."

Fontenoy, a little disturbed by the turn the conversation had taken, shifted uneasily in his fauteuil, and finally got up and stood with his back to the mantelpiece.

“Real love,” Edmée went on, in her gentle, deep voice, “genuine love—love, in a word, does not weary and faint by the way at the end of a brief period of time. When a man and woman love, the trials of life, far from parting them, only serve to bring them nearer to each other. They grow old together, connected by ties that are constantly growing closer and dearer, and of which age may change the nature but not the strength. They have the same ideas, the same friendships, the same tastes, though neither may necessarily on that account lose his own individuality, and when old age draws near they are not afraid, because they know they will depart together with the same hopes, for the same bourn. And that, my friend, is the dream that I am cherishing for Juliette.”

Fontenoy was affected, but nerving himself to put a good face on the matter, he replied with an indulgent smile:

“That is the old story of Philemon and Baucis that you are giving me, my dear Edmée, and we are getting close on to the twentieth century.”

“Such marriages are to be met with everywhere; alike in the lower and in the higher classes of society, and it is my belief, my friend, that they are the only truly happy ones.”

“That may be true, but they are rare. We can’t all of us look for such unadulterated felicity. Perfect men and women are scarce in our generation.”

“One need not be perfect to love,” Edmée

rejoined, somewhat sadly. "All that one has to do is to love, nothing more."

"But—we have loved!" Gilbert insisted.

She looked him frankly in the face. "No," said she.

He averted his eyes. To be told that one has not been loved by his wife, even when one has ceased greatly to care for her, and twenty years have rolled by since one's marriage, is not altogether flattering to one's vanity.

"I did my best to love you," Edmée continued. "If you had only—but you could not help it. You did not love me, and I gave up trying."

She spoke with her accustomed gentleness, sobered by a slight tinge of melancholy; that past among whose embers she was raking was so remote, so far away!

"I was too young," she resumed. "I did not know myself. To-day I can see wherein I erred. But youth has flown and left us. We have many years before us yet, however. I hope with all my heart that they may be years of happiness to you."

"I thank you," said Gilbert. He would have liked to give her his hand, nay, perhaps take her to his bosom, as a recompense for her silence and patience during that long period of time, but he was afraid of making himself ridiculous in her eyes; and she appeared so unconcerned, moreover, that he was not sure she might not be displeased.

"As for Juliette," she went on, in a less se-

rious tone, "the question is not of the past, but of the future, and we must do our best that that future may be a bright one. She was saying the other day that when people marry they never know whether some day they may not be divorced. That was a step toward recognition of that remedy, sometimes necessary, always cruel, that ought never to be resorted to except as a last resource, when, all other means having been exhausted and life having become unendurable, the only choice lies between it and death."

"Most assuredly!" Fontenoy emphatically assented. "I know, speaking for myself, that, even if I were unhappy, I would far rather bear the burden of my misery than see my private affairs laid open to the gaze of a greedy public."

"Perhaps that is because you do not know what it is to be unhappy," said Edmée. "Those are matters that can be rightly appreciated only by those who suffer. But rest assured, my friend, that by far the greater part of the divorces whose increasing frequency we view with such sorrow and apprehension can only be attributed to the fact that the marriages that went before were concluded as ours was."

"As ours was?" said Fontenoy, wonderingly.

"Yes, exactly. A young girl is married to a man, of greater or less capacity for pleasing. After a while he draws apart from her—she draws away from him—not without suffering perhaps; and then, some day along comes an-

other man who loves her and who tells her so. She is perfectly honest. She feels she would like to marry the one who promises to love her. The other one had only promised to be her husband. And that is why so many marriages that seemed as if they ought to last forever endure so short a time. We are born to love, all of us here on earth, whatever our condition."

Gilbert listened with more and more surprise to these words of semi-worldly wisdom as they dropped from his wife's lips. Of course, man is born to love; he had seen that for himself; and certain women, too, since he had been loved. Could it be that the irreproachable women—the white sheep of the flock—were also going to demand that a place be reserved for them at the great banquet of love? The world would be turned topsy-turvy.

"It is for that reason that I wish to see Juliette happy and loved," Mme. Fontenoy continued. "I would be willing to concede a great deal to attain that end. I don't want her to marry that little Descrosses; he is not worthy of her. But, such as he is, I would rather see her his wife than your friend's, if she really loved him."

Gilbert was silent. Suddenly he raised his head:

"And suppose Malvois loved her—what then?"

"With a real, genuine love?"

"Yes; with what you call genuine love."

"Then let him show it! Let him gain her love, and I will be his best friend and advocate."

"But, my dear," said Gilbert, rather subtly—he felt that he had not shone with great brilliancy thus far in the conversation—"by what token are we to recognize genuine love?"

She raised her fine brown eyes to her skeptic husband's face, and tranquilly replied:

"By suffering!"

"Then poor Fabien is to be subjected to the tortures of a masonic initiation?" he said, in a tone of levity. "Will it take long?"

"He shall be subjected to nothing at all, my friend," Edmée replied, without appearing to be nettled by the question. "Those children do not know each other. Let them have a chance to become acquainted, to see something more of each other than they can do in society. Let them mutually find out each other's faults and make sure that they can put up with them; for if they are some time to find out that they cannot get along together in harmony, won't it be better for them to acquire the knowledge now rather than hereafter when it is too late?"

"You speak like a book," Fontenoy assented. "Then you are for a fair and square trial?"

"A fair trial beforehand—under certain rules and restrictions, of course—will be better than a foul divorce afterward."

"Those be words of wisdom!" said Gilbert. "Well, we'll see what comes of it. If you will invite Juliette down for a portion of the sum-

mer I will see to it that Fabien is in the neighborhood. Will that be agreeable to you?"

"Perfectly."

Nothing more was said. The silence was oppressive. After a little Edmée spoke up, rather timidly:

"You are not angry with me, my friend?"

"Why should I be angry? Because you spoke to me with frankness? I should say that it is you who have the greater reason to complain, inasmuch as I have failed to realize your expectations. But I confess I did not think myself such a great sinner. We see our neighbors everywhere around us living as we do, and they don't seem to be the worse for it. It is a question of how one looks at it. What o'clock is it? Only ten? I think I will step around to the club."

He had risen and was making for the door. She stopped him with an imploring gesture.

"I beg you won't stay out late!"

"I shall be careful not to. I know the interest that you feel in my welfare, and also what I owe you for watching over it so tenderly."

He came back from the threshold and touched his lips lightly to the hand which his wife did not extend to him.

"Good-night," he said, and vanished.

Edmée folded up her work and tossed it in the basket, then retired at once to her chamber. The calmness that she had displayed throughout their conversation must have been assumed, for no sooner was she alone than her pent-up

feelings relieved themselves in a violent outburst of indignation.

“The ingrate!” she said. “Really, I am too good to him! He deserves—”

She never told what Gilbert deserved, for at that moment her wrath was extinguished in a flood of tears, which she made haste to dry. But far into the night she lay tossing on her bed, sad, weary and discouraged.

“And yet I ought to be satisfied,” she reflected along toward morning, “for Juliette is safe, for this time at least!”

VIII.

IF any one had predicted to Mme. Fontenoy twenty-four hours in advance that she was about to tell her husband—bearding the lion in his den, as it were—so many extraordinary truths and enunciate ideas so repugnant to all the accepted conventions of society, she would have been greatly astonished. In that unpremeditated declaration of principles she had suddenly, and entirely without forethought, eased her mind of all the grievances and disappointments of a lifetime. It was a veritable surprise. If she had thought the matter over beforehand she would never have dared to plan the attack, and still less carry it into execution. But Fontenoy was even more astonished than his wife. It was as if a paving-stone had been

flung into the stagnant marsh where his conjugal indifference had been slumbering so many years and had aroused a deafening clamor, a regular batrachian symphony of croaking, with which his ears rung again.

How! Mme. Fontenoy had not been happy? She had not found that life of moral somnolence, agreeably diversified by her social avocations, the paradise he had supposed? He was tempted to be vexed with her. Really, now, a well-bred woman like her ought not to come maundering to him with her sentimental notions—especially when they were retrospective. For what good purpose can it serve to rake up old matters that a man can do nothing to remedy? Really, Mme. Fontenoy would have shown more discretion and better taste if she had kept silence on those theories of hers. He had never asked her to divulge them. But she had not given that proof of her superior wisdom, and her husband was disgusted and annoyed. What was he to do now?

To one who has not a flint where his heart should be there is nothing more unpleasant than to know he has been the cause, even involuntarily, of a state of affairs that has resulted in real suffering; and this feeling is intensified when it is a question not of a single fortuitous accident, but of the good or bad employment of a lifetime. It was certainly not Fontenoy's fault if his wife took it in her head at that juncture to exhibit romantic tendencies when during all their married life she had seemed

extremely reasonable; but that disposition was undeniably there, and if she could not lay down the law for her husband—there was no question of *that*—she had none the less framed a sort of indictment against him. Now I ask you candidly, could there be anything more unkind, when it was time the offense was outlawed?

All at once the sky of Fontenoy's meditations grew dark as at the moment when the storm is at its height: too late? What had Comte Forest told him? That Edmée had never appeared more beautiful—and it was the truth. In his proprietary capacity he had admitted the impeachment, not without satisfaction. She was thirty-eight years old. Fontenoy had read Octave Feuillet and knew the time of life when the crisis may be expected. Suppose Edmée, fairer than the day, at an age when reason, duty, religion even, cannot always be relied on to still the imperious voice of nature, should conceive the fancy to gather the late roses of her summer season before her beauty faded, what would then be the condition of affairs in that hitherto peaceful household?

Fontenoy had his foot on the first step of the club staircase when this dire contingency presented itself to his affrighted imagination. A servant had relieved him of his overcoat, he had merged the individual in the clubman. He had a mind to ask for his overcoat, leave the building, and continue his meditations in the street; but a vague impression—reminding him of an occasion when that manner of communing with

himself had not resulted quite as he could have wished—restrained him, and he abandoned the idea. He would reflect on the matter later.

The first person he set eyes on was Fabien. A fortunate encounter! There are days when it would seem as if everything was bound to go against you; this state of affairs, moreover, is a well-known fact; it is classified and registered, and is called “being down on one’s luck.” Fabien was conversing with a man of fine presence and attractive face whose acquaintance Fontenoy had not yet made. He tried to slip by unnoticed, and thus avoid an interview that he had no stomach for, but his relative had seen him and was already holding out his hand.

“I was not expecting to see you,” he said. “Is it on my account that you are here?”

“No—not exactly,” Fontenoy replied.

To dismiss the subject he cast his eyes around the room. Fabien thought that he desired a presentation to his interlocutor.

“Monsieur d’Argillesse—Monsieur Fontenoy,” said he. “Monsieur d’Argillesse is a great friend of mine; something of an explorer and a great bibliomaniac—”

“—phile,” D’Argillesse corrected, with a smile. “It has not attained the proportions of a mania yet.”

“It is not far removed from it, my dear friend, when a man pays two thousand francs for a single binding. But, to resume my introduction—whom I met in the course of my travels in Ceylon—”

“Quite a distance from the boulevard,” again the traveler interrupted, “whither he was always longing to return; for it is there that one has most opportunities to meet his friends.”

The three men conversed discursively on various subjects. Fontenoy, delighted with the chance afforded him of delaying the moment of his tête-à-tête with his cousin, fastened on the newcomer, who proved most agreeable. He was one of those men in whom one can divine the existence of a multitude of attractive qualities, while not quite able to tell whether those qualities will stand the test of time. But that is a requirement that is not exacted in society.

D'Argillesse left them presently, however, to take his place at one of the card-tables, and Fontenoy felt that the inevitable moment was come. He suffered himself to be haled away to a sofa, and submitted with the resignation of despair.

“Well,” asked Fabien, “have you good news for me?”

“Yes, and no,” replied the unfortunate relative, mentally reverting to the memory of an excessively unpleasant half hour. “My wife does not decline your proposition, but—really, I don't know how to express myself. I had supposed she was more positive, more practical. A woman, you know, sometimes desires for others things that— In a word, she has conceived a notion that her niece ought to make a marriage of inclination.”

Fabien did not appear the least bit surprised.

“Why, that strikes me as reasonable enough. I must tell you, so far as I am concerned, that had I not felt an inclination for Mdlle. Chas-sagny, neither her beauty nor her fortune would have sufficed to inspire me with the wish to make her my wife.”

“Of course—of course,” said Fontenoy, his mind a tangle of recollections and meditations. “Everybody knows that we don’t want to marry a girl unless she suits us. But that doesn’t quite come up to Mme. Fontenoy’s expectations. I am afraid she’s just the least little bit romantic. In a word, my dear Fabien, she insists that you should make yourself loved—with real love! Simply to please won’t answer.”

Malvois had so far preserved silence, his eyes bent on the floor. Suddenly he raised his head and looked his relative in the face with a look of honest frankness that the latter had never remarked before.

“Well,” said he, “my cousin is right.” (It was the first time he had ever used that appellation in speaking of Edmée, and Fontenoy was surprised.) “She is perfectly right. Life is a sufficiently uninteresting affair, at best, if we don’t infuse into it the best we can get out of ourselves. Come, my dear friend and cousin, just look at it. We shuffle the cards here all the evening; we sup across the way, or elsewhere; in autumn we hunt; in spring we attend the races, and so forth, and so forth. And those are the occupations that serve to fill the existence of an idle man—for that’s what we all, or nearly all,

are in our set. Don't you think that a little speck of love, the genuine article; that which is not bought or sold; that which costs us neither remorse nor actions that we have to blush for afterward—don't you think that something of that sort would look well in the life of an honest man?"

"Of course—of course," repeated Fontenoy.

"And our children, if we have any, are they not the stronger, handsomer and braver for being the issue of a genuine affection, instead of a caprice sanctioned by the law? And the future—ah! the future. It presents itself to me in radiant colors. Old age creeps on us gently, and we never notice its approach. For a lifetime our habits have been the same, we share the same ideas of men and things, we have got over quarreling and are good friends, we play bezique together when the children are married and gone away. Really, it is a pleasure to look forward to old age. Tell me, cousin, have you ever reflected on old age?"

"Sometimes," said Fontenoy, without confessing that his reflections on the subject were of recent date.

"Well, then you must have pictured it to yourself as abounding in sunshine and gladness, for if there is a person in all the wide world who promises to give one the idea of a glorious autumn it is Mme. Fontenoy, if one may judge by the performance of her radiant summer. And look here, I am going to tell you all that is in my mind. I should never have thought of Mdlle.

Juliette had it not been that she is so like her aunt."

"Do you think so?" said Fontenoy, a little disconcerted.

"Haven't you noticed it? There's the same expression, the same form, the same way of carrying the head. Fifteen years hence Mdlle. Juliette will be—at least I hope so, for her sake—the very image of her aunt as she is now. My dear cousin, will you please tell Madame Fontenoy that, so far from finding fault with her edict, I submit to it with joy? I am ready to wait as long as she shall desire, provided only she will let me have a little hope."

"That is for you to say. You ought to know by this time whether you are agreeable to Juliette."

"I have told you. I am entirely ignorant whether I am or not. But if it is necessary to find out, find out I will; or, at least, I'll try my best to do so. But you must afford me opportunities to make myself agreeable."

"That is no more than fair. We'll see to it."

"And to-morrow I will come and thank my protectress—my protectress unawares to herself. You'll admit, won't you, that if her severity results in bringing about a love-match, I shall owe her a debt of eternal gratitude? But you don't look as if you believed it."

"Oh, yes—oh, yes—only—"

"Only what?"

"Let's not be in too great a hurry, my young friend. Suppose you contract this marriage over

which you are so enthusiastic for the moment, aren't you afraid that, in the future—"

"Afraid of what?"

"Eh! how should I know? Well—of creating bad precedents, of mortgaging your freedom in the future, of finding yourself the slave of a woman's whimsies."

Fabien laughed heartily. "You talk like a regular old skeptic," said he. "You remind me of Forest. I see how it is. You don't want to own up to your happiness; you are afraid of appearing ridiculous. Come, I'll keep your secret; I won't tell anybody that you are the most fortunate husband of our generation. But you must help me to become like you."

"I wonder if he was making game of me?" Fontenoy thought, as he went and took a seat at a whist-table. "Or is it really true that Edmée and I have the appearance of such a loving couple? What he has seen of us has been for the most part since my sickness, and it is an undeniable fact that she was exemplary—yes, that's the word, exemplary. But if matters are going to continue in the same way, the thing will become a bore."

As he was leaving the house, he found himself face to face with D'Argillesse, who asked if he might be allowed to call on him.

"Why, certainly, with the greatest pleasure!" Fontenoy replied.

IX.

WHEN Fabien presented himself in Mme. Fontenoy's drawing-room to express his thanks, he found Juliette there. It was a piece of good luck on which he had not reckoned. As a matter of course, it had been agreed that the young girl, externally at least, should appear ignorant of his proceeding. But everybody knows what those negotiations mean; hence Malvois was a little ill at ease, and could not quite convince himself that Juliette really knew nothing of the business. She was as lively and as full of repartee as ever, with her pretty, bird-like airs, and the young man had to admit that her naturalness was more than a match for his diplomacy. She was continually interrupting by irrelevant and apparently innocent remarks the circumlocutory phrases by means of which Fabien endeavored to express to Mme. Fontenoy his gratitude and obedience, so that Edmée, who was highly amused by the novelty of the situation, finally adopted the expedient of sending her on an errand to the kitchen in order to be rid of her for a moment.

"Yes, aunt, I'll go," she replied, after an astonished silence, and with so droll an air of surprise that Edmée could scarce refrain from laughing. Even Fabien found it difficult to repress a smile. When she had vanished, he turned

eagerly to Mme. Fontenoy in order to avail himself of the opportunity which he knew must be brief.

“You have been very kind and very prudent, madame,” he said, “and I thank you a great deal more than I am able to express in words. If my desires are realized, I shall be indebted to that prudence for the highest happiness that can befall an honest man—one who is devoid of ambition of any kind, either political or literary.”

“It all depends on you,” replied Edmée, whose face had assumed a thoughtful look. “In that case your happiness will proceed from yourself, who will have invoked it and brought it within your grasp. Many would have passed it by without so much as giving it a thought.”

“Do you believe that?” said Fabien with surprise. “Is it not altogether natural?”

“That depends. So far as I can see—this is intended as a compliment—your ideas on the subject of marriage are somewhat English.”

“Oh, madame! and French too, I assure you. A great many of my friends have married under the same conditions that you are imposing upon me, and have been the better for it. Only a few days ago, in—how shall I designate it?—in official circles, we danced at the wedding of a young couple who were head over ears, in love with each other. And I pledge you my word, it’s an actual fact that the walls of the minister’s dwelling looked down on the proceedings and did not crumble away for horror! But you are entirely right in compelling me to fight my own

battle, and earn a recompense that I desired to obtain on too easy terms. Trust me; I will prove myself not unworthy!"

He spoke warmly, with just a tinge of railery, as if he feared he might appear ridiculous. But Edmée did not consider him in the least ridiculous, only enthusiastic and very young, notwithstanding the thirty years which he was not afraid to acknowledge. She answered him with a smile and an approving nod. She saw Juliette, with a face unusually sedate, coming toward them through the two connecting rooms of the suite. Her experience of difficult situations of the present nature being small, she had some trouble in hitting on a subject of conversation that did not appear unnaturally strained, and Fabien, whose back was to the door, was about to proceed with his eulogy of conjugal love, when she suddenly interrupted him by asking:

"Have you been to see Salammbo?"

"No, madame," he replied with presence of mind, "but I am expecting to go next week."

Juliette, from the threshold, eyed them with a mocking smile. Assured by the young man's answer that her presence was no longer unwelcome, she came in, and almost immediately Fabien took his leave.

When he was gone, Juliette came and sat down on a low stool at Edmée's feet, a position that she particularly affected, and gravely said to her:

"Aunt, this is not your day, and you know we had arranged between us to spend our after-

noon peacefully in shopping. Will you have the kindness to tell me why you received M. Malvois? And why, to make matters worse, did you receive him downstairs here, in the apartments of ceremony?"

"My dear," Edmee replied, "since your uncle's recovery we only receive our intimate friends upstairs, and M. Malvois is not one of those."

"Yes; but he aspires to be one," Juliette retorted without raising her eyes. "Come, my best of aunts, that is jesuitical, you know; you only answered half my question. But never mind, I'll let you off the other half. And now, will you please inform me why you sent me away just now? I'm afraid your inventive faculties are not as alert as they should be, if you'll excuse me for saying so. If things are to continue in this way, you'll have to call in one or two of my young friends to give you a few lessons."

"Continue in what way? What do you mean, Juliette?" said Edmee, beginning to look grave.

"Why, this little game of yours! Come, my dear aunt, be frank. Does M. Malvois come here on your account, or on mine?"

"Upon my word, Juliette," said Edmee, with some irritation, "I don't see what I'm going to do with you!"

"There, my dear, pretty aunt, don't, please don't be angry, I beg you! Suppose men should pay you a little attention, would there be anything so strange in that? If I were to speak my mind right out in meeting— But you'll scare

me to death again, with those big eyes of yours!"

"I don't see how you can make matters worse," said Edmee, impelled by an unacknowledged curiosity concealed under a laughing manner. "You can speak out. I won't eat you."

"Then I will proceed. The strange part of the business, it strikes me, is that you don't receive more attention than you do. The men hang round other women, when there's not one of them that can begin to compare with you for good looks—and that's as true as Gospel!"

"‘If your voice were like your plumage—’" said Mme. Fontenoy, with a laugh. "What sublimity of cheek! I suppose it is to secure forgiveness for your impertinence that you resort to such shameless flattery?"

"You know very well that I am speaking the truth," Juliette imperturbably replied. "And you know very well too that all women have their admirers. There are some of them, in this respect, who are— I don't want to say what they are, but I can tell you the thing disgusts me enough when I see it! While, as for you, you are a beautiful swan, solitary on the bosom of the lake. You don't want to hear any more of my poetic effusions? Well then, auntie, it is useless to beat about the bush any longer, for you are too intelligent not to see what I am driving at. As M. Malvois did not come to see you to-day, which is not your day, and as you manufactured a pretext for sending me away so that you might have a chance to talk with him at

your ease—it follows, don't it, that it was on my account that the gentleman gave himself the trouble to visit your hospitable mansion?"

"You are insupportable!" replied Edmee, unable to keep from laughing. "Supposing it were on your account, what would you think of it?"

"Aunt, your question is too indefinite, and, moreover, it is not one that I can answer with propriety. I have already had occasion to remind you that it is not good form for young ladies to think of gentlemen—or, at least, speak of them—until such time as the aforesaid gentlemen may have stated their intentions."

"And supposing he harbors an intention of making such a statement, provided you encourage him to do so, at some future day?"

"'Dunque io sou quella felice!' " trilled Juliette, after the manner of Rosina in the "Barber of Seville." "It is to me the royal favor is accorded—or will be, if I approve. *Do I approve? That is the question.*"

"You are anticipating," said Mme. Fontenoy, fearing she might have said too much. "Matters have not gone to the length you suppose. This is the situation: if M. Malvois is agreeable to you, and if you continue to be agreeable to him—"

"Then I *am* agreeable to him?"

"If you are, it is not by reason of the extreme sobriety of your language."

"Oh!" exclaimed the madcap girl, "I never give him time to reflect that I am tiresome."

"I can believe that; you talk all the time. The

pleasure of your conversation may fall on him in the end, however. To state the matter in a nutshell, if in time you and he feel certain that you can live together happily, then your uncle and I, and consequently your mother, who will be guided by our advice, will do nothing to hinder your marriage. And now, Juliette, give me your attention and try to be serious for a moment. This is a subject that we must not trifle with, my child. If you do not feel a genuine inclination for M. Malvois, say so at once. No one is justified in sporting with a man's affections, inspiring him with confidence, allowing him to believe he may be loved, and then afterward abandoning him. It would be wicked, worse than an error—it would be a crime.”

“How solemnly you speak, dear aunt. You almost frighten me,” said Juliette, deeply moved. “You are as pale as a ghost!”

The thoughtless girl threw herself on Edmee's bosom and strained her to her heart, at that moment filled with a vague feeling of alarm.

“There,” said she, looking at her lovingly, “your color is beginning to come back; that's because I hugged you so hard. So you think I am a wicked girl, do you? Oh, my pretty Aunt Edmee, I don't want to be naughty. One has to go before the criminal court, doesn't she, when she has been naughty? I don't want to have to go to such a place; it must smell awfully there, with all the prisoners and the policemen—pew! You laugh! Yes, it is yourself; my dear aunt is restored to me again! So you are very, very

strict—very inexorable on the catechism of marriages of inclination. Marriage is a sacrament; it is in the catechism. Perhaps there is nothing said in it of marriages of inclination, though. But that's neither here nor there. And you won't allow me the least little bit of flirtation—just the slenderest, tiniest suspicion? It would be so innocent, and so nice!”

“Innocent?”

“With a lady's lover, and nice—with some one else. No, no, no, auntie, I didn't say it. Don't be angry. I retract, I eat my words, I take it all back! I think it all the same, though, you know.”

She laughed until the tears came, but was withal a little hysterical, as Edmee could perceive. When she had kissed her and allowed herself in turn to be caressed for a moment, she endeavored briefly to recapitulate the situation. But her niece took the words out of her mouth.

“The sum and substance of it is, if I have understood you aright, that I am engaged and not engaged, and it is all extremely clear. You don't think so? To me it is perfectly pellucid. M. Malvois is to come to this hospitable mansion and be accorded unlimited opportunities of paying his court to me. But in order that the arrangement may not be too boldly self-evident, other men are to be invited at the same time. In the others' eyes I shall be a marriageable young lady; in his I shall be just my plain unadorned self, so that he may have a chance to see me as I am.”

"That's it, exactly!" said Edmee, in amazement.

"Unless, that is—unless another man should chance to come along, my charming and adored aunt, whom I loved better. In which case you would not, I suppose, compel me to marry the first aspirant?"

"Certainly not. But in that event you should let me know at once, to avoid exciting hopes that were not to be realized."

"Of course. Otherwise, I am to be dragged before the judge, eh? But now for my side of the bargain. I am to be at liberty to turn my alleged suitor inside out and examine him in all his aspects, to make inquiries about him in case it be necessary, and ascertain if his character is all right, if his heart is a heart of gold or only base metal plated—plated jewelry is a great deal worn this year, so the fashion journals say, at least. I hope, for their sake, that the jewelers don't pay their advertising bills in kind! And, in conclusion, I claim the additional privilege of stirring him up a little now and then, so that he may not think his bird is too willing to be captured, which would be humiliating to my dignity. Are my terms accepted, auntie—is it a bargain?"

"Yes; but use your opportunities with moderation," said Edmee. "Tell me frankly, though, was it not to make me laugh that you said all those things? You have a little kindness for him, haven't you?"

"If I had not felt kindly toward him, my dear

aunt, I should have sent him packing long before this. You know very well that subjects are plentiful enough with me. The vivisectionists always find dogs at the pound, and we heiresses have no difficulty in finding lovers in society. Are you shocked at my cynicism? Wait; it is nothing to what it will be when I am married."

She ran away to the piano and began to practice scales, and the tremendous din drove the last of Edmee's scruples from her head.

X.

D'ARGILESSÉ, when presented to Mme. Fontenoy, produced an odd impression on her. He interested her much as a picture-book might have done, and she was a little afraid of him, as we are afraid of a work that we are not to read and that has been placed within our reach by a person whom we distrust. The result of this complicated condition of affairs was a rather eager desire to see him again, and, when seen again, to see him once more.

Nothing could have suited him better. And so she encountered him everywhere, at all those functions which people of fashion grace with their presence during the month of May; and those occasions are often more than diurnal. After a few days she was forced to acknowledge

to herself that he had fallen suddenly in love with her, or else that he was feigning with great adroitness—so adroitly that to doubt him seemed an injury. As was to be expected, Fontenoy had conceived a liking for this new acquaintance, and never failed to bring him to his wife whenever they chanced to be in the same place. Comte Forest, who had come up to Paris to see the Salon, the chestnut-trees in bloom, and the pretty women, so he said, joined Fabien and a few other men in forming for Mme. Fontenoy that species of body-guard which, whether she will or no, attends the steps of the mistress of a friendly house whenever she takes her walks abroad. Juliette profited by the occasion to submit Malvois to a series of small trials, from which, thanks to his imperturbable good humor, he had, so far, emerged victorious. The affairs of the little band were going on swimmingly, and all its members seemed to be having a good time.

“That ball, auntie—how about it?” suggested Juliette, one Friday, as they were leisurely strolling in the sculpture gallery of the Salon in the Champs-Élysées. “You promised me a ball.”

“A ball? Promising involves performance, madame,” said Fabien to Mme. Fontenoy. “If you have promised, we must dance.”

“I did not promise anything,” Edmee replied with a smile.

“Yes, yes; you did promise, auntie! Surely you can’t have forgotten?” Turning to Fabien,

who was with D'Argillesse a little way behind, she added, explanatorily: "It is in pursuance of a vow she made last winter when my uncle was sick; if he recovered she was to give a ball of thanksgiving."

"That," said Fabien, with an unmoved face, "is inviolable. When will you fulfill your obligation, dear madame?"

"Is it quite inevitable? I won't attempt to deny that—"

"It's all on account of those horrid old carpets," interjected Juliette, over her right shoulder.

"The carpets? But we'll go down on our knees and take them up ourselves. Don't let that be an excuse. Where is Fontenoy, so that we may offer our services at once?"

Edmee's look went roving down the long gallery, where busts innumerable were displayed, some high, others low; these looking to the right, those to the left; sometimes with a scowling expression, again with a smile on their face—exactly as we see them in real life.

During the last hour she had several times caught sight of her husband fluttering about different women—if it be not a misuse of terms to apply the word flutter to a person so dignified in all his proceedings as Fontenoy was. She had seen him gradually edge up to a group, in the midst of which Mme. Verseley was displaying her charms, and linger there a few minutes; then he had taken himself off to some other quarter, and she had lost sight of him.

“My uncle is over yonder,” said Juliette, “talking to that green woman.”

Mme. Verseley's gown was of dark blue with azure trimmings. But Edmee understood perfectly her niece's meaning, who, ever since the evening of that dinner which had left her with such an unpleasant impression, had always spoken of the lady periphrastically, never calling her by name. So, he had gone back again to that creature? What the strange attraction could be that drew him to her was more than Edmee could understand.

“Monsieur Malvois, won't you be so kind as to go and tell my uncle to come and talk with us about the ball. We might as well get it off our hands while we are about it.”

Fabien left the group, which continued to make its way slowly toward the exit of the hall. After a little parleying he returned with Fontenoy, whom Juliette immediately engaged at close quarters.

“There's no retreating now, uncle,” she said, “your ships are burned. I am the guilty one; you need not look elsewhere for an object of your wrath. I have informed these gentlemen that it is your firm and deliberate intention to give a ball one of these days. All that remains to do is to fix the date. Select an early one, and make us all happy.”

Fontenoy was no more inclined to give a ball than he was to start at that moment for Chicago. But D'Argillesse was already at work indoctrinating him with his views of how things should

be done, as if the dance had been determined on beyond a peradventure. He turned to his wife and said, resignedly:

“There’s no getting out of it?”

“It seems not.”

“It’s for your honor and glory, uncle,” declared Juliette. “We’ll put you up on a platform, and perform a torch dance round you. And little Descrosses has promised to invent a cotilion—a cotilion that will be remembered for ever and a day!”

“I’ve not the slightest doubt of it,” said Fontenoy. “Well, my dear, since there is no escape for us, what have you to say?”

Edmee did not answer. D’Argillesse had just asked her, in an undertone, one of those seemingly unimportant questions that left her disturbed in mind, perplexed, almost frightened to find herself talking thus to a man who was a comparative stranger, while at the same time she was unable to account for her mental disturbance and feeling of self-reproach.

“Edmee!” said Fontenoy, in a slightly raised tone.

She started, and turned toward him. D’Argillesse had fallen back, and was conversing with Forest. It was Fabien, standing behind her, on whom lighted the husband’s look of surprise.

“Pardon me, my friend,” said she, her face a little flushed, “you were asking me—”

“What you think of this ball?”

“I think that Juliette will never forgive us if we deny her this gratification. And as she is a

spoiled child, and we can't afford to quarrel with her—"

"That settles it. When shall it be?"

"Some time in Grand Prix week," Juliette declared in triumph. "Don't you appreciate my generosity? I have given you fifteen whole days—days of twenty-four hours."

"Much obliged," said Fontenoy. "Well, we must act in accordance with such lights as are given us. I must avail myself of your experience, Malvois, and yours too, D'Argillesse. For, ridiculous as it may appear to you, we have never had a dance in our house before this."

"Oh, uncle, you need not lament that circumstance. There have been dinners enough to make up," said Juliette. "I hope I shall be consulted?"

"Of course you shall. You shall have two votes. If it suits your convenience, gentlemen, we'll meet at my house to-morrow, about three in the afternoon, to see what is to be done."

They separated, and each went his way. Comte Forest, who was to dine with Fontenoy, took a seat with the ladies in their open carriage.

"Well, uncle?" said Juliette, on seeing that he did not follow the comte's example.

"Thank you, I'll walk home."

He moved away in the direction of the Arc de Triomphe, followed by Edmee's gaze.

"Irregular in his attendance at meals?" Forest inquired of Mme. Fontenoy, whom he was scrutinizing closely.

"No; very regular. He always comes home

to dinner, or in case he doesn't, notifies me in advance."

"Ah, very good, very good!" the old man approvingly replied. "And that D'Argillesse, have you known him long?"

"No; only a very short time."

"Do you like him?"

Edmee reflected a moment. "I don't know," she replied, turning her pretty brown eyes on the old friend of the family.

"I don't like him a bit," asserted Juliette.

"Why not, if you please, mademoiselle? What has the gentleman ever done to you?" asked Forest, to whom her outspoken ways were a source of amusement.

"Nothing. But I don't like him because he makes queer remarks that astonish you, as if he had dropped a paving-stone into your plate of soup. I don't like people who say things that the rest can't understand."

"Who ever heard the like? Perhaps you'll think differently as you grow older."

"Not I—never!" said Juliette, reddening with indignation.

"Nevertheless, if your lover should have something to say to you, you wouldn't want him to shout it from the housetops?"

"Oh, that's when we're trying to get married. That's not the same thing at all," said she.

Forest turned to Edmee. "And they say that the race of ingenues is extinct!" said he, with a smile. "It cannot be denied, though, that they are no longer fashioned on the model of 1830."

Fontenoy made his appearance at the dinner hour, seemingly in the best of spirits. Although he exhibited the sedateness of a man of steady habits, Forest watched him with some curiosity. It would not be correct to say that he had been surprised by the mishap that had followed so closely on the warning he had formerly given Gilbert, but it had served to show how timely was his advice had it been regarded. The household in which, for some years past, he had manifested only a languid interest, was now suddenly become to him an object of engrossing interest. Something was occurring, or was about to occur, in that quiet and eminently respectable family. And Forest knew enough of life to feel assured that that something, whatever it was, was matter for regret. The frankness with which Mme. Fontenoy had answered his question concerning D'Argillesse proved to him that there was nothing irreparable as yet in that quarter; but the least mistake on Fontenoy's part, the slightest deviation from the path of propriety, might result in a state of affairs that afterward it would be impossible to control.

“What a fool my friend is!” Forest reflected, while enjoying the exquisite dinner that was placed before him. “He has a charming wife, frank, honest and fresh as a daisy, and he goes elsewhere searching for—what? Something far inferior, certainly, to what he has before him every day of his life. And here he has reached the age when successes among his own class are rarely to be met with. If he doesn't look out

he will fall into the clutches of a set where triumphs are expensive—in every way. And, meantime, his wife will be making little reflections of her own. She may be the very personification of all the domestic virtues, but there is nothing more insidious than those same reflections. And they might be so happy! I will keep my eye on that D'Argillesse!"

XI.

THE ball was at its height. Little Descrosses had promised that the cotilion should be something unique of its kind, and had kept his word, thanks to Fontenoy, who had given him unlimited credit with the shopkeepers.

"Oh, uncle!" Juliette exclaimed, when the favors came, "it is easy to see that you are a green hand. No one ever does things twice on a scale of such magnificence!"

She danced with an animation that seemed to render her ubiquitous. One would have surely said that there were at least two Juliettes in the room, to see how she was everywhere at once, always surrounded by a swarm of admirers, whom she would motion off with a circular wave of her fan when their attentions became too oppressive.

One of these Juliettes belonged *de facto* to little Descrosses, who had placed a lien on her—to use his own expression—and, thanks to his

privileges as leader, monopolized her most shamelessly. The other Juliette did her best to fulfill her duties as hostess by providing partners for the wall-flowers. But the latter so paled her fires before the former, that after a short while the "Monsieur Malvois, will you have the kindness to see—" was lost in the maze of ribbons and the tinkling of little bells, and M. Malvois was left at liberty to direct matters as he saw fit, seconded by Edmee, who, as she did not dance, kept a watchful eye on the festivities to see that they did not languish anywhere.

At last the cotilion was well under way. As a precautionary measure Fontenoy, who distrusted little Descrosses's ingenuity, had given orders to lock the two or three doors that were threatened by the farandole which had so excited Juliette's enthusiasm some months before. Partially reassured as to the inviolability of the garret and spare chambers, as well as of the cellar, he left the rest to chance, and went off to have a rubber of whist.

Edmee, for her part, had at last found a comfortable chair in a quiet corner, where a wall of non-dancers afforded her protection against the possible irruption of unoccupied mammas. She was actually in need of a few moments of silence and repose, which were all the more pleasurable to her that she could see the waltzers performing their evolutions at a short distance from her retreat.

Weary in mind and tired in body, Edmee yielded to the relaxation of the moment, rejoic-

ing in the thought that supper would soon be over, and she could go to bed. She had been on her feet continuously since morning, goaded on by the indefatigable Juliette, who declared that she must learn how to give a ball against the time she should be married and have a house of her own. Suddenly, without her having noticed his approach among the dancers, D'Argillesse stood at Edmee's side.

"You are very tired, dear madame, are you not?" said he, slipping into a vacant fauteuil that stood close at hand.

"A little," she replied, looking absently at the groups. They dissolved, formed again, and melted away with an elegance which, if modern, was none the less devoid of grace. "You are not dancing?" she politely added.

"I have something better to do, since you are here," D'Argillesse replied, with a significant glance.

Mme. Fontenoy experienced a mingled sensation of discomposure and annoyance. The man had an insinuating way of thrusting himself on her that left her undecided what to do. There was nothing in his manner that would authorize a woman to display resentment, unless she wished to subject herself to the imputation of extravagant prudery. And yet he went much further than was allowed by the customs and conventions of good society. She straightened up and assumed an attitude of more reserve. If D'Argillesse, thanks to the preparations for the ball, had been received in the house during the past

two weeks on a footing approaching intimacy, now, that pretext having ceased to exist, things would doubtless commence to move again in their accustomed order, and she would try to see they did so.

“Is it not charming?” said she, in order to infuse into the conversation the proper degree of banality—“is it not charming to see those young people enjoying themselves so thoroughly? For it is an undeniable fact that it is solely for young girls’ pleasure that balls are ever given. The enjoyment that married women take in them appears to be entirely conventional.”

“That is because they have other and more engrossing thoughts to occupy their minds,” D’Argillesse replied. “When we reach the age of thirty we feel the emptiness of these frivolities, and passion appears to us in its true light—the sunshine of our existence, toward which every created being turns. Have you ever considered, madame, how hollow the life must be that is void of love?”

The remembrance of the visit she had once paid, under such distressing circumstances, to the humble parish church rose to Edmee’s mind, with a taste of the bitter tears she had shed. She softly shook her head in an indifferent negation which she knew to be a falsehood. But why did that stranger come and revive memories on which she had studiously compelled herself to silence?

“The heart is strangely constituted,” D’Argillesse continued; “more so than we have any

idea of. We are the slaves of habit; yes, of habit even more than of convention. We wear, and have worn for years, a necklace—it may be light or heavy, it may be of gold or of baser metal—a necklace of trials and suffering. Necklaces may be of pearls, too, may they not, madame? And still, if the cord on which they are strung is so strong that it will not break, as happens sometimes, they may kill the wearer. I saw an instance of that in Ceylon. A Hindoo woman was found strangled, whether from revenge or jealousy I know not. A simple twist of the necklace that she wore round her neck. Think how strong the cord must have been!”

“Yes, indeed!” Edmee murmured.

“And still, what could be simpler than to loose the clasp that fastens the necklace? It can be resumed again when its owner desires to wear it. But in her moments of solitude she is free. Is it not just and lawful to employ to one’s pleasure or profit the commodities of which no one takes advantage?”

He spoke in metaphors and parables, of which Edmee grasped the meaning perfectly. They were revolting to her pride and honesty, and she knew not at what to take exception. The listener, hearing one of those impersonal phrases, could not have told what they contained to offend her. The offensive allusions were perceptible to her alone. But how could that man know that Edmee’s beauty and intelligence were commodities of which no one took advantage? Are those things patent to the world?

Profiting by the semi-privacy that the movements of the dancers created round them, D'Argillesse continued his remarks, adroit, insinuating, dangerous in the highest degree, because they seemed to be not the expression of a personal sentiment, but simply acknowledged truths.

“But, monsieur, among your theories what place do you assign to duty?” said Edmee, like one suddenly aroused from a profound slumber.

“There are two kinds of duty, madame—one, which society would impose on us, remnant of a time when woman, apparently a queen, was actually held in abjectest slavery; the other, the real, the veritable duty, that of the present day, of an epoch when each of us is striving to assert his individuality and make the most of his attributes and endowments. The latter orders us to give the widest extension to the component elements of our nature, in order that we may compete successfully with the strength and beauty of our time. As for me, if a true woman—one of beauty and intelligence, that is—should distinguish me with her love, I would do my best to leave her with recollections that should suffice to fill the remainder of her days. She would have learned then that it is worth while to live.”

“That is fine!” came from behind, in old Forest's voice.

On leaving the whist-table, he had looked for the mistress of the house, and descrying her at a distance in conversation with D'Argillesse, had

made the circuit of the apartments so as to come on them unawares.

“You talk wonderfully well, my dear sir,” he continued, dropping into the seat that D’Argillesse had vacated with somewhat of surprise. “But, tell me, are you thinking of getting married?”

“Why do you ask that?” the dilettante distrustfully inquired.

“Oh, for nothing in particular. Only, the rooms are full of charming young ladies, and now is the time for you to make your choice, or never.”

The conversation had lost its charm, now that there was a third person to take part in it, and D’Argillesse presently went away, not without some unspoken remarks of an unflattering tenor directed toward the individual whose ill-timed interference had endangered the security of the conquest he believed he had made.

Mme. Fontenoy felt ill at ease while chatting with Comte Forest, who continued to observe her closely. Certain of the words spoken by D’Argillesse had gone too straight to the vulnerable spot in her moral cuirass. She knew well that she had never lived; she had shrieked it in her own ears amid unchecked floods of tears. And now that she trusted and believed this secret wound was healed, thanks to her many preoccupations, such as Juliette’s matrimonial affairs, the purchase of a place where she designed to spend her summers, and many another small practical detail of daily life, was she to see its

bleeding edges torn apart again by imprudent words—imprudent? nay, insolent, all things considered, under their varnish of extreme respect.

In the tranquil indifference that she had lived in until these more recent times, Mme. Fontenoy had not given much thought to the attentions she had received; they were evidences of masculine politeness, she believed, in recognition of hospitalities extended, like a basket of flowers or a box of bonbons, offered without malice prepense, and to be accepted in the same spirit. Perhaps D'Argillesse's cautious declarations would have been filed away in the same pigeon-hole as the rest and labeled, "of no importance," had not Edmee's thoughts and feelings undergone a great change. And perhaps too he, who was not addicted to wasting his time, would have stopped short in the beginning had he not seen the discomposure that he was causing, and which, through a mistaken vanity, he attributed to other than its true motive. It was a mistake, but what general, be he the greatest strategist of ancient or modern times, has not some blunders set down to his account?

At the conclusion of the ball, supper was served to the guests seated at small tables. The idea emanated from D'Argillesse, who had no great hope of profiting by his ingenuity, for it was hardly probable that he would succeed in securing a place near Mme. Fontenoy. But the amiable contriver, if he could not flirt himself, was not unwilling that others should have an oppor-

tunity to pursue that agreeable pastime; the sight would afford him a certain gratification.

To say that Edmee was delighted with the aspect of the supper-room would perhaps be something of an exaggeration. Still, she saw but little to find fault with, unless it might be an occasional rather audacious flirtation. Juliette was at the head of a table of six, where little Descrosses made the seventh. Fabien had come in late—was it chance? or had the wicked Juliette contrived it purposely?—and was seated at a remote table. He filled his pretty neighbors' plates, and poured the wine with an awkward hand, while his eyes were continually turning to the young girl, encountering on the way snowy shoulders and touzled heads without number, to which he paid no heed whatever.

Everything in this world comes to an end at some time, even tiresome situations, even late suppers. The hosts were left standing amid the ruins of their salons, which had the appearance of having been devastated by a hurricane, littered as they were with flowers, bits of tulle, scraps of gilded paper—all the refuse and wreckage of the cotilion.

“We are like leaders of a victorious army,” said Juliette, “we sleep on the field of battle. But you know I can just as well go home, aunt, instead of taking the bed you have had prepared for me, if my presence incommodes you. What time is it? Five o'clock? Really, I don't know whether it is yesterday afternoon or this morning. I don't want to go to bed. I feel a great

deal more like taking a horseback ride. What do you say to giving me a fencing lesson, uncle, right here, now, in my ball-dress?"

"The best thing you can do is to take your candle and go up to your room," Fontenoy replied.

"My candle? Oh, cherished uncle of my soul, behold!"

Juliette ran to the window and parted the curtains. The sun was shining brightly into the little garden of the hotel, dusting the tops of the four great chestnut-trees with gold.

"It is abominable!" Fontenoy declared. "There ought to be a law passed prohibiting balls except in winter-time. At that season one can go to bed at five in the morning without having the daylight stare him out of countenance, while now— And that confounded electricity running at full blast!"

He gave an order, and the rooms were immediately shrouded in darkness. But the level rays of the June sun found their way through the interstices of the blinds, touching in their passage the beveled edge of a mirror, the gilding of the cornice, the shimmering silk of the hangings.

"We are not decent to behold," said Gilbert. "I am ashamed of myself. Good-night, my dears; or, rather, good-day!"

Fifteen minutes later every one was asleep excepting Edmee. She had thrown open the window of her dressing-room that faced the garden and donned a peignoir of white woolen stuff, and

curled up in her great comfortable easy-chair, repeated to herself those words of D'Argillesse:

“If one has never known the joys of life, what boots it to have lived?”

XII.

ON the second day afterward—for the first had been a *dies non* for most of those who had participated in the revels—Edmee, soon after breakfast, received a visit from Fabien. He appeared dejected; he was even somber, so far as his sunny temperament permitted.

“I inquired and ascertained that my cousin is not at home,” said he. “It is for your ear alone, dear madame, that my confidences are intended.”

“Take a chair,” Edmee kindly replied. She also was sad and discouraged, and, therefore, inclined to sympathize with the discouragements of others. “What is the matter?”

“The matter is that Mdlle. Juliette does not love me, will never love me, and I may as well give her up at once. She scarcely danced at all with me the other evening. She did not even seem to be aware that I was there; and, at supper, I was forced to take a seat away at the other end of the room. She does not care for me, that's clear.”

He stopped, his breath exhausted, and perhaps his anger also.

“True,” said Mme. Fontenoy, “I noticed that at supper you were not near her, but that proves nothing.”

“It would prove nothing if she did not show preferences—preferences of which I am not the object. That witty little gentleman”—Fabien spoke the words with unutterable contempt—“that insufferable little gentleman who led the cotilion engrossed all her actions. I won’t say her thoughts, for, unfortunately, I have no means of knowing what they were.”

“You do well to say nothing of her thoughts,” replied Edmee, with a smile. “I don’t believe that my niece had two ideas in her head that evening that were unrelated to the cotilion.”

“That may be true, but I was given the mitten, as plainly as ever a man was. And for whom, I would like to ask?”

Edmee extended her pretty white hand deprecatingly toward the afflicted one. “Come,” said she, “don’t be tragical; that would be treating little Descrosses with more consideration than he deserves. Own up! you are jealous of him?”

If there is one thing more than another that a man is unwilling to admit, it is just that. Fabien was not sufficiently unlike the common run of mortal men to act differently than they. He defended himself with teeth and claws; but Edmee pressed him hard, and finally, after a heroic struggle, he acknowledged himself vanquished.

“It is true,” he said; “*I am* jealous. But confess that there is sufficient reason.”

“Well, no; there is not sufficient reason,” re-

joined Mme. Fontenoy. "At the beginning of winter I asked myself, as you did, if Juliette—"

"There, you see!" exclaimed the poor fellow. "And at the beginning of winter, before I had said a word!"

"Wouldn't it be as well to let me finish?" Edmee calmly asked. "And the answer I made myself, after mature reflection, was: 'No.'"

"To-day, you might ask yourself the same question, and the answer would be, 'Yes.'"

"No! I say to you. She has neither friendship nor esteem for Descrosses; he amuses her, that's all."

"Oh, very good! If I were married, though, I would not tolerate for any great length of time a gentleman who made himself so amusing to my wife; I would soon find a way to get rid of him by—"

Edmee interrupted him, speaking very seriously. "If those are your real sentiments," she said, "I would not advise you to marry either Juliette or any other woman." In reply to his amazed look of inquiry she added: "The young woman of to-day is not to be treated as a child. That answered very well for us in old times; nowadays young girls enjoy a freedom that many consider they are not entitled to, but which no one thinks of taking from them, perhaps because the task would be too difficult a one. How can you expect that my niece, or any other girl, once she is married, will willingly submit to restrictions from her husband that her parents never dreamed of imposing on her? Juliette has been

spoiled a little, it is true, but think how perfectly honest and frank she is. Nothing could tempt her to do an underhanded thing."

"That's just the reason why I love her," cried Fabien. "She is adorable, with her impulsive, thoughtless ways; or, perhaps, because of them. But if she prefers that fellow to me—"

"She does not prefer him, of that you can rest assured. Would you be a despot to your wife, Monsieur Malvois?"

"I don't know, dear madame. I had always believed myself to be a decent sort of fellow, and not overhard to get along with. I see now that I am not quite what I supposed I was. Still, I don't know that there's enough against me to hang me for. And if I really thought that Mdlle. Juliette doesn't love that Descrosses—I have been growing very fond of her of late—"

"But not enough to prevent your being a trifle jealous," said Edmee, with a kindly smile. "Come, can't you try and be a little reasonable? We shall leave Paris soon. Our place is not far from Cerisy, where Comte Forest's château is. Would you like that he should ask you down to spend a few weeks with him? We shall visit back and forth a good deal. The freedom of country life will give you opportunities to cultivate my niece's good graces, and if you really are not suited to each other you will quickly find it out and know what you have to depend on, one way or the other."

"You are angelically good!" Fabien replied with feeling. "It is unnecessary to say with

what gratitude I accept your offer, and also how desirous I am to be successful in my suit. I never thought that the idea of seeing myself thrown over for another man could have caused me such anger and annoyance."

"That is the beginning of wisdom," said Edmee. "Didn't you know that one must suffer pain before he can fully appreciate pleasure?"

By way of answer Fabien bent over Mme. Fontenoy's hand and kissed it devoutly. Fontenoy, entering at that instant, heard his wife's words and saw the young man's action. He appeared not to notice them, and saluted his relative with his usual cordiality, after which the two men left the house together.

Edmee was not left long alone. While she was meditating on Malvois' brand new attack of jealousy, which she was inclined to consider rather childish, Comte Forest sent in his card.

When, on the night of the ball, he had interfered to end a conversation that appeared to him to bode no good, the old man had promised himself to give Mme. Fontenoy some information regarding an admirer who, as a matter of course, had taken pains to present himself in the most favorable light.

D'Argillesse was better known in other quarters. Very much of a gentleman, but skeptical as a man can be, and entirely destitute of scruples in matters relating to women, he would have made great sacrifices to save from ruin an acquaintance, or even a stranger, provided he was of "the world;" but, with the same un-

ruffled tranquillity, would have robbed him of his newly married wife. The principles that he had set forth to Mme. Fontenoy were not manufactured for the occasion. He applied them to himself with real sincerity, carrying to its ultimate conclusion the maxim that exercises so great an influence over the inhabitants of the United States, doubtless because an imprudent but generous statesman saw fit to insert it in the Declaration of Independence; he said that *every created being is entitled to his share of happiness*. His happiness lay in feeling the beating of his own heart. What men call pleasure was repugnant to him; he considered it vulgar. The object of his longing was love. He had met with it, now and then. He hoped to find it again, and in his researches carried havoc into the households of his friends without ever thinking that he was doing them a wrong. Has not every one a right to his portion of happiness? And every one's wife, too, as well? On the other hand, he would not have so much as looked at a young girl otherwise than with the eye of indifference. His best friends, however, asserted that that would not last forever, and that he was saving them until the last. This he denied strenuously, and was sincere. But who can tell what thoughts are in the mind of a man of pleasure when he is beginning to grow old, and losing his powers of self-command?

This was the man, whom his very sincerity rendered dangerous, that Forest had undertaken to strip of his factitious charms; but the task

was no easy one. Nothing is more hazardous than to say to a woman, especially if she is intelligent: "Distrust that man!" The chief danger, in case the malady has not made much progress, lies in the fact that she is apt to think of him all the more. Therefore, Edmee's old friend began by beating about the bush and touching on a hundred other subjects, trusting gradually to narrow down the conversation and bring it to the point on which he wished to direct it.

But Mme. Fontenoy, who had divined the object of his visit, at first eluded him with great adroitness. She was not by any means of a Machiavelian temperament, but there is an instinct in us all that warns us to shun those things that are dangerous or disagreeable. She felt that she could not hear D'Argillesse's name mentioned without blushing, and her cheeks tingled uncomfortably at the prospect. Perceiving that he was found out, Forest, to use a common expression, took the bull by the horns.

"It was at the club, wasn't it," said he, "that Fontenoy picked up M. d'Argillesse? There's a little of all sorts to be found in a club, no matter how select it may be. Oh, the gentleman is entirely irreproachable; I have nothing to allege against him. But in club life we encounter great men of every description, from M. de Chateaubriand down to Don Juan. D'Argillesse's peculiarities would entitle him to a place in the latter category. He is a brilliant man, an extremely brilliant man. He has but one defect

that I know of, and that is a rare inconstancy."

The blow had told. Edmee lowered her eyes and bit her lips. Forest courageously continued:

"You are really too squeamish, my child. Like the ermine that cannot endure to have its coat defiled, your antipathy to all that is base and low has kept you from acquainting yourself with the seamy side of life, and a little knowledge of those matters is as helpful to a married woman as it is harmful to a young girl. You have made it a practice to dismiss tales of that description by saying that they did not interest you, and your companions and associates have always been pure and noble women. That is an admirable trait, and I applaud you for it; but don't you think now that it might be well to increase your store of information?"

"I do not think so," Edmee faintly said, averting her head.

"Oh, yes, you do! Fontenoy should have kept you posted on these matters. It is a portion of the education that every husband owes to his wife; but he appears to have neglected his duty in that respect. I am a grandfather, a great-grandfather—though unblessed with posterity. I am literally crammed with anecdote and information, like a book so filled with notes that its covers will not close. I am going to impart to you a little knowledge out of my abundance. We will begin with Malvois."

Edmee pricked up her ears, and looked at

Forest with astonishment at this unexpected termination of his discourse.

“He is a youth of feeling,” the Nestor of society continued. “He is abundantly endowed with intelligence and instruction, and even with experience. His chief defect, so far as the fashion of the time goes, is that he is not a pessimist; but that fashion is even now beginning to be out of date, and he is all ready for the next, which must inevitably be a benevolent optimism. A few years will suffice to bring it about, and although I am an old, old man, I hope to see its advent. It will be a change, and then it is so much more cheerful. To come back to Malvois, he has laid down for himself as the first and chief of all his duties that he is to marry without delay. And speaking of duty, he is one of those who will afford excellent examples as husbands, and, later on, make good fathers. He has just the degree of firmness that is required to bring up a family of boys in a time when it is the fashion to let them do pretty much as they please.”

“It is astonishing. You know him to perfection!” Edmee exclaimed.

“I don’t claim any great credit for it. It is only a knack of observing things,” Forest complacently replied. “Malvois is a house of glass; one only has to use his eyes to see what is going on inside. So, you want him for a husband for your little Juliette?”

“Did he tell you that?”

“No; I saw it for myself.”

"It is the truth, only the idea did not originate with me; it was my husband's. I am not opposed to it."

"And you even favor it, don't you? For it is manifest that you befriend him. You do right."

"Since you approve our course," said Edmee, seizing the offered opportunity, "invite him down to Cerisy, so that he may have a chance to pay his addresses to Juliette more uninterruptedly. I should be glad to see those children make a rare marriage."

"A marriage of love? You are right; it will be so much gained from the enemy. You don't comprehend? The enemy, my child, is the monster spoken of in Holy Writ that goes about seeking whom he may devour. It is the romance that you women wish to infuse into your life, and, more particularly, that men wish to infuse into it, with or without your consent. In former times the enemy used to say to women that they were not understood; now the expression excites derision when employed, but the substance remains unchanged. He is not a very sharp fellow, the enemy, and he repeats himself. The formula he makes use of to-day is: Every one is entitled to his share of happiness."

Edmee's dark-golden eyes expressed unutterable surprise. "Then you heard what he said?" those candid, handsome eyes said to her old friend.

"It amounts to exactly the same thing," Forest continued, passing the unspoken question by unnoticed. "To be uncomprehended, or to

have a right to a happiness which the husband does not give, where is the difference? D'Argillesse plays his one tune very prettily, and it has been the means of affording him more than one success. We call it a success when we look on it from the man's standpoint; for the woman it is an adventure."

These scathing words, apparently uttered with perfect innocence of purpose, in falling on the silence of the little drawing-room produced an effect somewhat like that of a stone tossed into a pool of stagnant water. Edmee started imperceptibly, as if a portion of the filth had splashed her garments.

"I do not claim to be better than my neighbors," Forest went on after a brief pause, "but my life has not been devoted solely to the gratification of my fancies. It is owing to that circumstance that when the time came for me to bid farewell to the world, I could do it with honor; I won't say without regret, but at all events without remorse. M. d'Argillesse will not be able to say as much when he reaches my time of life, provided he tells the truth. The result is, I have some friends left, women as well as men. When *he* reaches the age of seventy, if he ever does, he will have none of either sex; he will have only old companions, and that is an entirely different thing. How is Fontenoy?"

"Very well, I thank you," Edmee replied.

She dared not look at Forest. Her lips were quivering a little as they do when tears are rising, and in the pleasant warmth that came in

through the open windows she felt herself icy cold.

“So you are thinking of moving to La Tremblaye,” continued the old man, “and you want me to send an invitation to Malvois? I will do it without delay. What time will suit you best?”

“The end of July, if that is convenient for you. It will be as well that the young folks should not see each other for a little while; and then, my sister is going to Vichy for the benefit of the water. Juliette will accompany her, and be away six weeks.”

“Poor Mme. Chassagny! she has not had a very happy life of it. A husband who was always traveling during his lifetime, and a daughter who spends almost her whole time in visiting. She must be terribly lonely.”

“My sister, fortunately,” Edmee rejoined, “has always been of a retiring and somewhat unsocial bent.”

“Isn't that a rather strange remark?” said Forest, with a laugh. “Do you consider it fortunate to have such a disposition?”

“Yes, looking at it in one way. If she had been of a more cheerful temperament she would have accompanied her husband on his travels, and kept Juliette with her. I used to pity the poor child in that silent house, where never a soul came.”

“I am not reproaching you, my dear child, for having, in a certain sense, adopted her. It was well done, and if Mme. Chassagny is fond of solitude, she must have had her fill of it.

Well, that affair is settled; there is nothing more to say, and in a few days I shall be back at Cerisy. We are going to be neighbors, and I rejoice most heartily in the prospect. The big house at La Tremblaye, with its tight-closed shutters, was like a blot on my horizon. It will be a pleasure to see it wake up and give some signs of life."

"You can trust Juliette for that," Edmee replied.

This conversation produced a profound impression on Mme. Fontenoy. The word "adventure" had burned like a red-hot iron. Although she had never asked herself into what D'Argillesse's assiduities might ultimately develop—who ever has courage to look these actualities directly in the face?—she felt that she was not well equipped for defense. She had listened with too much of interest, too much of curiosity, to words that, masked under a crafty show of impersonality, she knew contained a covert insult. She resolved to chastise herself for having listened, and to devote herself entirely to Fontenoy, whose health was not quite all that could be desired.

That gentleman had been in too great a hurry to resume his usual mode of living. As soon as our health is restored, or we think it is, we manifest a disposition to throw physic to the dogs, and to treat the doctor as a tiresome kill-joy; we believe our constitution to be of iron, and the restraints that are imposed on us for our good we dismiss summarily as so many attempts against our freedom. This course may answer

while we are young, but with advancing years comes a conviction that regimen is not without its advantages. Fontenoy was now passing through this disagreeable experience; hence he made no very decided objection to his wife's plans for spending the summer at the country. Milk was prescribed him, milk should be his beverage, and as he was compelled to drink it it was better in every way that it should be supplied by his own cows. He had never looked with much favor on country life when protracted beyond a certain length of time, but with his own guests and his neighbors' he thought he should be able to get through the season after a fashion; and since the seashore was prohibited, he would try to put up with the banks of the Oise. It was in this resigned fashion that he accorded his assent to Edmee's proposition.

"What have we in the way of neighbors, outside of Forest and his company?"

Mme. Fontenoy mentioned the names of two or three families of their acquaintance within easy distance.

"Fabien will be at Forest's; that's capital—only he will be taken up with Juliette, and we can't depend much on him. We want some one for ourselves; we had better invite D'Argillesse."

"What! him?" exclaimed Edmee, turning deathly pale. "Surely you must be joking. We shall have Juliette."

"Well, what of that? He's not a marrying man; he's not on the lookout for a wife. Fabien couldn't take offense."

"All the more reason for not inviting him," Mme. Fontenoy firmly said. "It is out of the question."

"Decidedly, luck is against me," said Gilbert, in a peevish tone. "I come across an agreeable companion, abounding in interesting narrative, for he has seen no end of things and relates them charmingly, and here you must go and take a dislike to him."

"I have not taken a dislike to him," Edmee replied, trembling, partly with indignation, partly with sorrow to see how everything conspired to thwart her good intentions; "but it is not a proper time to have him in the house. Have you no other friends?"

"If I pass him by, I can't in common decency invite any one else," her husband grumblingly replied. "If you can't see that for yourself, there's no use in my trying to explain it to you. If you have taken the notion in your head that we are to have no attractive persons in our house until Juliette is married off, well and good; that ends the matter. But I hope you will succeed in getting her off your hands this year, at all events."

Edmee made no reply; what could she have said? And, besides, her heart was so heavy that she feared she would be unable to keep back her tears, so she swallowed her mortification and distress in silence and went to look after her household affairs. But when she was alone in her chamber, looking round her for that mute sympathy that we sometimes find in familiar

objects—dumb witnesses of our daily life which sometimes speak to us so loudly and evoke such profound memories—and finding nothing of it there, she pressed her hands to her aching heart.

“My God!” she said, “how hard it is to be true and honest.”

XIII.

LA TREMBLAYE was a big square house, whose aspect was neither feudal nor even imposing. With its many windows, each like the other, it offered in its massiveness an appearance of solidity sufficient to defy the fiercest storms of winter; a fact which does not of necessity imply elegance, as Juliette said, who disrespectfully spoke of it as an old mill “made over.”

The old mill, however—for the allegation was, to a certain extent, founded on fact—had been converted into an extremely charming dwelling. The former owners had had something to do with this; for under their directions the walls had been clothed with a prodigious variety of creeping plants. The north side, in particular, was covered with five-leaved ivy, whose pendant runners would present in autumn a most brilliant display of every shade of red. In addition to the adornment of the greenery, Edmee had bought and caused to be put in place a dozen old pot-bellied balconies of hammered iron, which gave to the somewhat elevated rez-de-chaussee a

certain Louis XIII. air that harmonized agreeably with the pointed roofs. An interior gallery, connecting two wings built on the two banks of a pretty little stream, the Nonnette, seemed to afford an argument in favor of the mill hypothesis, but it was now pierced with so many windows of fanciful design that it had been selected by common consent to serve as a place of refuge during the hot hours of the day. Underneath it the stream could be heard gurgling over its bed of mossy stones, sole remaining vestige of the old waterfall.

“It is our Chenonceaux,” said Edmee, “and in case things should take a bad turn, I don’t know that I should mind being the miller’s wife in such a mill.”

Fontenoy, whose taste was very good, put in a month agreeably in watching the decorators and upholsterers at their work. He was not ashamed at a pinch to mount a ladder and assist in fixing a rebellious roll of paper on the wall. The pleasure of seeing objects, in themselves ungainly, assume an artistic appearance under our direction is certainly conducive to the development of good humor, as Edmee experienced in her husband’s case. To rise early—at eight o’clock—to breathe pure air, drink unadulterated milk, and go to bed at ten with a wholesome sensation of fatigue, these were pleasures which Gilbert had never carried to excess, and which attracted him not only by reason of their novelty, but of their morally as well as materially hygienic influence.

It really seemed to him that he was growing younger. His life of the preceding winter appeared to him like one of those hideous dreams from which one awakens dazed and helpless, with an undefined dread of discovering that the dream was reality. And just as, after a dream of this description, the pure air entering our chamber from without seems to us delicious and exhilarating as an effervescent draught, so the delight at finding himself on the hither shore of Cocytus caused him at times to thrill with little shudders of satisfaction.

"Ah! things are going famously," he said to his wife, one evening, as they were taking the air on a terrace that opened off the dining-room. "We have got through our month of trial splendidly. What do *you* say, Edmee?"

"Of trial?" inquired Edmee, handing him his cup of coffee boiling hot and sugared to his liking.

"Well, yes—of solitude, if you like that better. Wasn't it a trial? We were alone, and, judging from my own experience, were not bored."

"I am never bored," said Edmee, in her gentle voice. Then, fearing her answer might appear pedantic, she immediately amended it by saying: "With a dozen or fifteen workmen constantly in the house, we haven't even had time to read the newspaper."

Fontenoy smiled and touched his lips to the beverage whose aroma filled the air around him. Truly, the time had been well spent. His health

was better, his moral tone was excellent. The utmost he felt when Mme. Verseley's memory came back to him was a slight shock, a sort of burning sensation in the temporal region. In all probability their outing would come to an end without any untoward incident, and in the autumn he would be able, without danger as without evil intent, to inaugurate another nice little flirtation. Because we are fifty years old it doesn't follow that we are to renounce all the joys of life, does it? Fontenoy had not the remotest intention of retiring from the stage. He remained a few moments, out of politeness, when he had disposed of his cup of coffee, then retreated to his smoking-room. Edmee allowed him to smoke in her presence, and in addition they were in the open air. But a smoking-room afforded excellent opportunities for solitary meditation, to say nothing of a short nap at times.

When he was gone, Edmee rang and gave orders to remove the tray, then abandoned herself to her reflections.

She had come down there with an indescribable, mysterious joy, with that secret impatience which possesses us when life appears to have something novel in store for us. To the orderly arrangement of that dwelling, where everything seemed to indicate that she was to pass all her remaining summers and autumns, she had devoted something more than taste and industry; she had infused into it a portion of her own being. Now that her task was completed she sat with folded hands, slightly discouraged, under

the influence of a strange impression for which she did not endeavor to account, and whose significance might be best expressed by the question: "Is that all?"

She certainly had not hoped that the old mill would afford her an entirely new existence, but she had perhaps looked forward to finding there some recompense for her labor. A recompense? Oh! a very, very small one, almost nothing—what? She could not tell, and the absence of that intangible something for which she herself could not find a name made her sad, then sadder still, until finally she was ready to give way to tears.

Cry? Certainly not! Edmee knew what tears cost. More than all, she knew that they must be hidden, and accustomed as she was to hide none of her actions, the constraint appeared to her humiliating. She passed her slender hand across her pretty eyes and rose. The heat of the day had doubtless taxed her strength too severely. Why should she feel like crying, otherwise?

The next day Juliette arrived, a little less rattle-pated than was usual with her.

"What ails you?" Fontenoy asked, surprised to see her so quiet during dinner.

"I am resting, uncle," she gravely replied. "You never saw a pin-wheel that went on revolving and spitting fire forever, did you? You won't reproach me if I am a little silent; you are too kind to do that."

"You are not ill, I hope?" he inquired, with real solicitude.

She laughed merrily. "No, my dear uncle; there is no cause for alarm on that score. You know, I have been at Vichy, and the effect of the Vichy water is depressing, as every one is aware."

"But you did not drink it?" said Fontenoy.

"There is my uncle 'up a tree!' Come down, uncle, if you please. No, I did not drink it; if I had it would have been a genuine case of marasmus. But just looking at the others drink was sufficient to produce that effect on me."

When the dinner was over she asked her uncle to show her the flower garden, and when she had plied him with a thousand preposterous questions about the flowers, of which he knew as little as she did, explained to him the reason of her melancholy.

"I did not wish to speak of it before Aunt Edmee," she said, "who is none too cheerful as it is, but my poor mamma is not at all well."

"It is the effect of taking the water," gently intimated M. Fontenoy, who was inclined to be optimistic where his neighbors' ailments were concerned.

"I don't like to contradict you, uncle, and I'm sorry to dispel your illusion, but the water hasn't everything to do with it. I know that it makes most people cross and ill-natured. If mamma were only cross, as she always used to be, it would take such a great load off my mind! But she hardly ever scolds any one now, and her manner is so gentle and resigned that it makes my heart bleed."

Fontenoy knew not what answer to make. He laid his hand on his niece's head and smoothed her hair affectionately, which had the effect of inducing the girl to go on with increased confidence.

“Well, as I was going to say, when we returned to the Clocher—what in the world makes her so fond of that old Clocher is one of the mysteries that I despair of ever solving! A place where there is not a green thing to be seen, no water, nothing! A country house in the Beauce, with twenty leagues of wheat-fields around it on every side, and one solitary cypress shading the house, on the north side! You have never been there, you have never seen the Clocher, have you, uncle?”

“I must confess I have not.”

“Well, then, don't go there; you would die of melancholy before you had been there a week. I believe it's nothing in the world but that that has soured mamma's temper so. When we want to breathe the fresh air we go and sit on the shady side of the house, and on Sundays—but on Sundays only, so as not to wear it out—the servants are allowed to sit in the shadow of the bell-tower; for there is a bell-tower on top of the pigeon-house—a sort of round tower, you know. But there are no pigeons there now, on account of the grain; they devour too much of it, the poor pigeons! You can see for yourself that no one can live there and preserve his amiability; it's entirely out of the question.”

“I would recommend you to abuse the Beauce,”

said Fontenoy, by way of changing the subject, for the conversation was becoming lugubrious. "Would you be the rich heiress that you are if your property were situated in the Landes?"

"But I never said that it was cheerful among the Landes, uncle. I like it much better here, I assure you."

She turned and cast a look of satisfaction on the great trees that lined the banks of the Nonnette. Behind the house they could hear the sound of the paddle wielded by a belated servant girl, as with hurried blows she pounded the linen exposed upon a rock. The air was heavy with the perfume of the roses which still lingered on the overloaded bushes, and of the purple clusters of the wisteria, now blooming for the second time.

"It smells good here," she said; "at home it smells of the manure-pile; but then our property brings us in something, while yours, uncle, is only a source of expense."

"Why did you not bring your mother with you?" Fontenoy asked, in a half-hearted way. He had always looked forward to his sister-in-law's visits with apprehension. Mme. Chassagny, even in her most cheerful moments, had never failed to chill and depress him like a November fog.

"Oh, uncle! To help get me a husband? You are not in earnest?"

Juliette spoke so seriously that her uncle allowed what seemed like a strange remark to pass unnoticed. Besides, the presence of a woman

stern and morose, as was Mme. Chassagny, would evidently be out of place among the pretty frivolities of the courtship as planned by Edmee.

"It couldn't be," the young girl continued. "But poor mamma is left alone with no one to keep her company, down there in her Clocher, and it makes me feel very bad. I offered to remain with her, but she said, 'No; go and enjoy yourself.' As if I could enjoy myself when things are in such a state!"

"We'll try to find something to amuse you," said Fontenoy, consolingly. "There is company over at Comte Forest's; my cousin, Fabien, is expected soon."

With a charming little movement of the shoulders, Juliette gave him to understand that Fabien was indifferent to her.

"And then our neighbors, those excellent old people, the Frémonts, always have something going on in their house."

"What! are the Fremonts neighbors of yours? Oh, that is awfully jolly! They are the queerest people you ever saw."

Fontenoy, a trifle surprised, gave his niece an interrogative look.

"It is exactly as I tell you," she declared, emphasizing her words with a succession of vehement little nods. "In the first place, there are the two girls, Enguerrande and Maguelonne; if there had been a third, I suppose they would have christened her Broceliande. And then there is a moat surrounding the house, and a drawbridge and portcullis, only they can't raise

it because it is so rusty, and as it is made of cast-iron they don't dare to touch it for fear of breaking something about the machinery. And there are frogs in the moat, exactly like an old feudal castle; they caught them and put them in there to hear them croak; and Enguerrande has a man to beat the water at night time so the noise shan't keep her awake. But the old gardener is cute; he didn't like the idea of sitting up o' nights, so he rigged up an arrangement—a sort of automatic water-splasher, like the dasher of a churn, you know, and connected it with a windmill that goes round when there is any wind, and then he goes home and goes to bed.”

“Who was it told you all those wonderful things?” asked Fontenoy, whose breath was almost taken away by such an overwhelming torrent of information on matters of which he was entirely ignorant, albeit he had been on visiting terms with the family for upward of twenty years.

“Little Descrosses. He was there last year, and you can count to a certainty on seeing him there again this year. If you don't believe me, just ask him if what I told you isn't true.”

The idea that little Descrosses was coming into their neighborhood was not particularly pleasing to Fontenoy, on Malvois' account; he did not press the subject further.

“Oh, well, if the old Fremonts are living here, we shan't find it tiresome,” Juliette continued, in a tone as if that question was settled finally;

then, turning to Fontenoy, she added: "But, in that case, why does my aunt look so down in the mouth?"

"We have not seen much of our neighbors, thus far," Gilbert explained. "Do you really think that your aunt looks—"

"I couldn't tell you exactly how she looks," the young girl replied; "but she certainly does not look happy. Haven't you noticed it?"

"It is probably the heat," Edmee's husband disingenuously rejoined; "and then we've been working hard. To-morrow we'll show you what we have accomplished, and afterward we'll go and pay the Fremonts a visit."

"Oh, I shall like that!" Juliette exclaimed.

The next day found her with a violent headache; it was nothing more than the effect of her journey in the extreme heat; but after some hours of languid sauntering and looking for cool spots, the young girl retired to her room and lay down on her bed, where it seemed to her that a good sleep, if she could obtain it, would do her more good than anything. Fontenoy proposed to his wife that they should no longer defer their long-promised visit to their neighbors, and as the distance between the two houses was but little more than half a mile of thickly-shaded road along the river-bank, they started forth together, about three o'clock in the afternoon.

The narrowness of the path did not permit of their walking abreast. Edmee took the lead, followed at a few steps' distance by her preoccupied spouse. When they struck into the road again,

he ranged up alongside her and addressed her one or two unimportant remarks, and it was in this eminently conjugal array that they presented themselves before the chateau of their worthy neighbors.

The structure was of brick and stucco, and notwithstanding its feudal appearance, resembled a fortress about as closely as the lions of the Institute resemble the fierce denizens of the desert. Of scant proportions, moreover, and built in the worst days of the romantic craze, it had stood for twenty years after its owner's death without finding a purchaser, until the moment when Mme. Fremont, chancing to set eyes on it, had declared that some good genie must have reared it for her especial behoof.

Having bought the property, therefore, she took up her quarters in it with her family, and the visitors that year by year came there in droves with the advent of fine weather. The house was as inconvenient and ill-arranged as could be conceived. One instance was that the angular furniture of the present day could by no possibility be made to fit the circular rooms of the towers. Little Descrosses asserted that he could never sleep in those apartments until he had first curled himself up in a ball, dog-fashion; but it was never known that this consideration deterred him from accepting the frequent invitations with which he was favored.

For the time being the frogs were slumbering in the moat, and all the garrison of the fortress were gathered on the lawn in the shade of the

magnificent old oaks, devoting themselves to croquet. M. Fremont wielded his mallet as vigorously as the youngest of them, while his wife kept tally of the strokes and acted as referee and judge in the frequent quarrels; for, whether or not the fact is to be attributed to its English origin, croquet does not humanize men's manners, it rather tends to brutalize them; there is no pastime going that is so prolific of squabbling and clapper-clawing. There are some games—chess, for instance—that engender a courteous habit; croquet is essentially quarrelsome.

When Edmee had exchanged the usual civilities with the excellent old couple, and turned to survey the company, the very first person her eyes lighted on was Mme. Verseley. There was nothing of the water-sprite about the lady to-day; but her gown, of some thin yellowish material, fantastically striped with black, gave her a serpentine appearance that harmonized to perfection with her small flat head and glittering eyes. The impression came to her so suddenly, and was at the same time so disagreeable, that Mme. Fontenoy was unable to control a slight instinctive movement of avoidance, not so slight, perhaps, however, as to pass unnoticed by Mme. Verseley. Enguerrande and Maguelonne were a pair of rather showy, bustling girls. The former, thirty-five years old, had abandoned all hopes of marriage, while the latter, five or six years her sister's junior, was still on the warpath, and determined to leave no stone unturned to win a husband. The game had just come to an

end, and they were about to begin a new one; for there were seasons when some particular sport seized on the chateau and raged with the virulence of an epidemic. Edmee, on being solicited to join it, replied that the heat was too great, and she preferred to be a spectator. Fontenoy had made a similar answer, and was looking for a vacant chair, when Mme. Verseley stepped forward and tendered him a mallet.

Her eyes half-closed, her thin lips retracted in a smile almost of irony, there was something about her provoking as an insult, and perverted as an indecent book. Her attitude seemed to express: "I know that you will refuse, but if you do I shall think you are a sorry specimen of a gentleman."

Fontenoy's face had been very pale. Suddenly the blood rushed to his neck and ears. Edmée, who had been watching him, was frightened by the sudden change, and made a movement as if to go to him, but he had taken the mallet in his hand and was bowing before his quondam friend. Fate—was it fate? or was it design?—gave him Mme. Verseley for an adversary, and the game began.

It lagged at first, but after a few random, tentative strokes, it became more interesting. Every one played well, and Fontenoy was celebrated for his proficiency. Mme. Verseley was not a skillful player, but being supple and quick-witted, she sometimes was successful where her partners failed. The others gradually fell out and left the decision of the event in their hands.

They plied their mallets with a concentrated intensity that seemed to have destroyed their faculty of speech. Fontenoy's strokes, delivered with precision and assurance, were driving his own and his allies' balls toward the goal. Hers rang out distinct and nervous as a slap on the face, and not even the risk of spoiling her own chances was sufficient to restrain her when she saw an opportunity of doing her opponent an ill-turn. The other players, reduced to the tame and spiritless function of spectators, nevertheless watched with intense interest to see what the final result would be. Edmée followed the game with an emotion for which she herself was unable to account. Seeing her husband on the point of making a wrong play, she suffered a low cry of warning to escape her, but it was too late. Fontenoy stopped short, mallet in hand, disgusted to have endangered by an inexplicable blunder, the almost assured success of his party.

Mme. Verseley, with fixed gaze and lips tightly compressed, her mind and body subjected to an extraordinary tension, kept gradually advancing with gentle, even strokes, always nearing the goal. She stopped and raised her head.

"That is your ball, is it not, M. Fontenoy?" she asked in her distinct, slightly metallic voice.

He bowed in silent assent.

With a sharp blow that found an echo in Edmée's heart, she sent her adversary's ball rolling away into the shrubbery, so far, that

some one left the group to run after it and save it from falling into the ditch. Then, with an ill-natured air of triumph, Mme. Verseley completed her victory, amid the plaudits of her side.

"Admirably played, my dear," Mme. Frémont said to her, "only it was hardly necessary to drive that poor ball so far!"

Fontenoy came up to her, very pale and with parted lips.

"You owe me a revenge, madame," he said to the young woman.

She looked him in the eyes, her compressed lips relaxed in a bewitching smile, and she became once more a woman, as she so well knew how to be.

"If you desire it!" said she, with voluptuous nonchalance, resting the weight of her slight form on her mallet until the elastic stick bent.

"Take your places!" cried Maguelonne, as she ran to the goal.

Edmée rose and crossed over to where her husband stood.

"I think I shall go home," said she, not venturing to look him in the face, so great was her dread of reading what was in his eyes or permitting him to read what was in hers. "I am afraid Juliette may need me."

"Very well," he replied, scarcely conscious of what she said to him, and rejoined his party. Disregarding the entreaties of her hosts and the offer of an escort, Edmée left the assemblage.

When about to make her exit from the park, she turned and looked around.

Off in the distance, under the umbrageous oaks, the conflict had been resumed. She could distinguish her husband's gray jacket and the snaky gown of his antagonist.

She closed the gate behind her and was on the road, alone.

Mechanically she directed her steps toward the path, crossing, in order to reach it, a broad sunlit space where the ground seemed to scorch her feet. She felt the need of shade, of silence, of the retirement of the friendly wood, to conceal her disappointment. She felt herself vanquished. Something had failed her in her life, something that she had cherished without knowing it. What was it? A sudden illumination flashed in upon her mind: it was her husband's health, that had already been in peril once, and that this encounter would endanger afresh. She felt it, she was sure of it. It was that woman who had disturbed Fontenoy's tranquillity to such an extent as to menace his existence. The sister of charity that was latent in Edmée rose in revolt. It was that righteous indignation, that unselfish anger, that set her entire being vibrating and quivering with apprehension. But whence that sensation of melancholy and discouragement?

Slowly, with lingering steps and hands hanging idly by her sides, she pursued her way under the great trees, unconsciously soothed and refreshed by their grateful shade, by the faint

murmur of the little stream rippling over its pebbly bed, by the lazy oscillation of the aquatic growths in spots where the water was deeper and more still. Her resentful feelings disappeared in some mysterious way, leaving her with only her melancholy and her fears. She would have sat down on the mossy bank to meditate had she dared, but that would not be decorous. She would wait until she had regained the privacy of her own grounds. She could already see the brown gate, half-hid among the willows, and she quickened her steps.

Outlined against the verdant background of the osiers, the form of a fisherman became visible. Slowly and with methodical circumspection he reeled in his line and detached the hooks. Edmée's course would lead her behind and quite near him; but who ever pays attention to a peaceful angler? Still, she felt glad that she had not stopped as she had thought of doing. A closer view showed her that the fisher was not a countryman. His suit of light cloth was the perfection of elegance, the hat that concealed his features had never seen the interior of a country store. When he had disposed of the other portions of his tackle he dexterously unjointed his rod and bestowed it in its case, then turned to Mme. Fontenoy, who by that time was quite near to him. It was D'Argillesse.

"How do you do, dear madame?" he said, with perfect coolness. "Are you surprised to see me here? You were not aware that I am a sinful

fisherman*—no pun intended, I assure you. There is not a stream within fifty miles of Paris whose holes I have not whipped with varying luck. But don't be hard on me. All my angling is done for the glory of it. No living soul, not even myself, has ever tasted the victims of my rod. I could not be so cruel—there, see!"

With a melodramatic gesture he emptied into the stream an elaborately contrived basket that contained two or three innocent little specimens of the finny tribe. Edmee looked at him in a dazed way, unable to articulate in her bewilderment. It was for her sake he was there, of that she felt absolutely certain. What was she to do?

"I wrote Fontenoy that I intended coming down to visit this part of the world. Your astonishment shows me that he can't have received my letter. I am quartered in the village with some worthy people, acquaintances of mine. I have been here before, many's the time. Are you homeward bound?"

"I am going home," said Edmee.

D'Argillesse's eyes appeared to be seeking to read what was in hers. He looked neither wicked nor dangerous in his semi-bucolical equipment; and she felt so sad, so lonely—

"The people about here tell me that you have bought the old mill? I can remember the time

* The words *pêcheur* and *pécheur* in French have the same pronunciation. The former means a sinner, the latter a fisherman.—Tr.

when it was a mill, even I, who stand here talking to you! But it seems you have transformed it into a palace. And so Fontenoy allows you to wander unattended about these lonely roads! Isn't he afraid that some one will steal you?"

He laughed lightly, so lightly that Edmee also smiled. The terror that D'Argillesse had caused her at Paris vanished in the dim light of the stream, among the shadows of the verdure, in presence of that rustic costume. A man who presents himself with a fishing-rod in his hand and under a straw hat is no longer dangerous, when one has always been accustomed to see him in evening dress by the light of the chandeliers; he is not the same man — and D'Argillesse did not say the same things, either.

A feeling of irresolution crept over Edmee. Her knees seemed to be weakening under her. She felt like sinking down among the herbage that smelled so good, and saying to that man who loved her—for he loved, but not in the same way as at Paris—"I am so lonely, so unhappy! My husband causes me such anxiety and sorrow!" It would have been stupid, ridiculous, and it would have done her good—yes—but after? what answer would he make?

Edmee's will reasserted itself, with a brusque movement that stiffened all her being, mental and physical.

"My husband is over at M. Frémont's," she said, "deeply interested in a great game of croquet that is going on there. If you choose to go and meet him, you will be sure to find him,

in about an hour from now, either on the path or on the road."

She passed in front of him, saluting him with a nod of the head, and entered the park. The sound of the latch falling back into its hasp behind her seemed to her an assurance of safety. Her strength suddenly failed her. She advanced a couple of steps, then stopped and supported herself against a tree.

Why should she refuse that which came to her unsought? She had not gone forth to meet it! He who had so long abandoned her to herself, paying her no more heed than he would have bestowed on a favorite dog; would not he be the real guilty one if she should lose her head?—the head alone, for the heart was in no danger.

"This is abominable!" she suddenly said to herself. "Such thoughts disgrace me."

Incapable of thought, her brain exhausted by so many conflicting impressions, she was about to resume her course, when the park gate was opened, very gently, with infinite precaution, but not without creaking on its hinges; for it was the gate of honest people and stood in no need of oiling, and D'Argillesse's head was thrust through the opening.

With the caution of a wild man of the woods he surveyed the winding path, the stream and the shrubbery, but neglected to turn his eyes on what was close at hand, and, moreover, the door, which he held almost tight closed, was between him and Mme. Fontenoy. She could see him,

though, distinctly, and on that face, handsome still, though ravaged by passion, she read an expression of diabolical wickedness, of brutal concupiscence, such as she had never seen on human face before.

All the blood in Edmee's body retreated to her heart, then surged upward to her forehead. She felt herself insulted as never woman in her sphere of life was insulted among her equals. Did that man dare to enter her grounds to play the spy on her, and was that bestial expression the true index of the sentiment she inspired in him? She had heard tell that there were men who, after dining generously, made women the subjects of their unedifying conversation; but she had never troubled herself to inquire what might be the nature of that conversation. Now she all at once divined it, and shook with mingled anger, shame and offended pride. If D'Argillesse had spoken to her at that moment she would, most likely, have struck him in the face, and felt for the remainder of her life an ineffaceable stain upon her hand. Fortunately, he did not see her, and withdrew his head with the same deliberate caution that he had displayed in introducing it. The door closed on him with a little shriek of rusty iron.

Edmee darted forward and pushed home the bolt with a strength she knew not was in her, then fled to the house as rapidly as she could run. She was in haste to hide herself; and, by washing her hands, her face and all her person to relieve them of the contamination of that

look, which yet had not lighted on her, but only sought her.

On entering the vestibule she was told that Juliette had not awakened and that the Comte Forest was awaiting her in the drawing-room. Was she never to have a moment to herself? Just as she was about to send in word asking him to excuse her for a little, Forest appeared in the doorway, wearing his usual pleasant smile.

A single brief glance at Mme. Fontenoy sufficed to tell the old man that something had happened beyond the common. With his practical common sense he at once plunged into a conversation on unimportant topics, and led the way into the drawing-room, where they were out of sight and hearing of the servants. When she had seated herself, he came and stood before her and softly asked:

“Is it anything in which I can help you?”

She cast on him a despairing look, such a look as the fawn gives when hard pushed by the pack, hid her crimson face with her hands, and was mute.

“My dear child,” Forest gravely said, “if you do not wish me to think the situation worse than it actually is, you must say something to reassure me.”

Edmee looked up in his face, but her look was one of fearless confidence, and in her candid eyes he did not read what he had feared to read there.

“I breathe again,” said he, forcing himself to smile; “but you frightened me badly. But

that is past and gone. You can tell me all now. Come, what is the matter?"

"The matter is," said Edmee, regaining her self-command, "that the situation my husband places me in is intolerable! At this very moment he is over at the Frémonts', playing croquet with Mme. Verseley."

She stopped short.

"Is that all? I don't see anything so very reprehensible in that," said the philosopher.

"Oh! no; of course not. But you know—for you know everything—that last winter he came near dying on her account, and now she is about to capture him again. She is taking possession of him now, she already has him in her clutches—she will be the death of him!"

"Hardly so bad as that!" Forest replied, in a cheerful tone. "We have time enough to come to his rescue."

"It is sport for her," Edmee vehemently continued. "She is a wicked, cold-blooded creature."

"I grant you she is wicked. As to her being cold-blooded, I cannot say. I have an idea that she pretends to be. But be reasonable, my dear child. Because Fontenoy has played a game of croquet with this dangerous person, it doesn't follow that he is hopelessly lost."

"Ah, if you could have seen her strike that ball! I felt as if the blow had fallen on my heart. I know that Gilbert cares precious little for me, and I, for my part—well, he is perfectly indifferent to me, I give you my word! Seven-

teen years have afforded us time in abundance to cease to love each other. But I bear his name, and I cannot bear to see him acting as he does before all the world and allowing that creature to make him her plaything. I hate her, I do!"

Hatred was a sentiment of which Edmee knew so little that she was quite upset herself by the violence of her explosion. She wrung her pretty hands with a heart-broken air, then sat mute and motionless, with eyes downcast—prey to an emotion that she had never known before.

"And is that all?" asked Forest. His intuition, acquired by much friendly converse with the sex, revealed to him the existence of another secret.

"All! Is it not enough? But you are right; there is something more. My husband—for after all Gilbert Fontenoy *is* my husband!—cares for me so little, is so entirely regardless of my feelings and wishes, that he has made a bosom-friend of M. d'Argillesse—"

She checked herself again. No! she could not, she positively could not, tell a human being of that which was her great humiliation, of that which was burning her like a brand of ignominy.

"And D'Argillesse is paying you attentions?" said Forest, concluding her sentence for her. "There is nothing extraordinary in that; he is not the first man who has done so, Edmee. Why should you be shocked by attentions com-

ing from him, which you regarded with indifference coming from other men?"

"Because he presumed to speak!" cried the poor woman, driven to bay at last. "He has insulted me! He sees what others have never seen; for until now has my husband preserved the outward forms of decency! He sees that I am a deserted wife, and am at every man's mercy! He is here, yes, here, to-day! I saw him! he was watching to intercept me as I passed. And if I should tell my husband, what would happen?"

"Fontenoy would say that you have been deluding yourself with figments of your brain—or else he might kill this exemplary gentleman. It would be no great loss, I admit, but it would not be pleasant for the survivor. And if he did not kill him, it would be more unpleasant still for everybody concerned. Say nothing; it is not advisable, as a general rule, to mention these matters to one's husband. I know that this advice is not in conformity with the precepts of primitive Christianity, but it is sound."

"I have no desire to tell him," Edmee replied, with more calmness. "You are right; he would probably laugh at me, in company with that detestable woman, may be—I wish she were dead and incapable of doing harm—"

"To Fontenoy?"

"To him and others."

Edmee averted her face under the scrutinizing gaze of her old friend.

“You don’t love your husband any more?” he asked, in a low, grave voice.

“Certainly not! What manner of woman should I be to love a man who has no regard for me! And to think how I nursed him, how I burned his letters without a word, without a question—”

“His letters?”

Edmee had gone too far to retreat. She briefly related the incident to Forest.

“It was well done, my child; very well done, indeed,” he said, approvingly. “And you are quite certain that you don’t love Fontenoy?”

“If it were not that I don’t want to appear destitute of Christian charity,” Edmee hotly answered, “I should say that I detest him!”

“You believe that? How happens it, then, my dear girl, that you are jealous of him?”

“I? Jealous?”

Edmee would have wished to treat the matter as a joke; but the laughter died away upon her lips, and she rose from her seat, trembling and white as a sheet.

“Yes, jealous, passionately jealous!” said Forest. “You may esteem yourself fortunate, my child, and favored above all; for, beautiful as you are, at this critical moment of your life, you are your own protector, and the protection is more effectual than any one will ever be able to afford you. You love that monster of ingratitude, that neglectful, unfeeling husband. Nay, my poor child, don’t say you are ashamed of it. We have to love, whether we will or no.

We are so constituted. And what is more honorable, more natural, more holy than for a wife to love her husband?"

"—Who does not love his wife?" asked Edmee, with flashing eyes and cheeks aflame.

"Yes, even though he do not love her. Scrutinize your very inmost thoughts and tell me this: Would you prefer to love another man who loves you?"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"There, you see that I am right! Now open your ears and receive an old anchorite's words of wisdom. In the first place, go and put on your handsomest gown and all your finery, for my especial gratification, for I like to see ladies looking attractive and well-dressed. It is one of my foibles. Then, if you please, you may invite me to dinner, for that is what I came here for, and if the dinner is a good one it will be all the more acceptable. And lastly, don't be surprised if you see your husband come home presently bringing D'Argillesse with him."

"Would he dare show his face here?" cried Edmee, threatening to become hysterical again.

"He is here for no other object. Were you so very hard on him?"

"I shut the park gate in his face," Mme. Fontenoy confessed, not without embarrassment.

"Officially?"

"Not exactly."

"Officiously. In that case the matter can be smoothed over. Be very amiable, this evening and at all times."

"Toward that man?"

"Toward everybody; toward me, toward Fabien—by the way, he will be here next week—yes, toward D'Argillesse, if you can compass it. Don't let that destroyer of feminine tranquillity see that you are afraid of him."

"Nor that I despise him?"

"Why should you despise him? Because he has discovered that you are handsome? No, no scorn, no contempt, only indifference—a brilliant indifference. That's the attitude that you want to take toward him. You are not afraid of him now, I suppose, or of any other man?"

Edmee answered him with a smile, accompanied by a charming blush that made her look even prettier than she had done twenty years before. As she passed him on her way up to her chamber he took her hand and on it imprinted a fatherly kiss.

"I am going to be your lover now," he said, "until the others detect me. You have something of Célimène in you, haven't you?"

"Not a bit!" she replied, with a charming expression of ingenuous doubt.

"It is easily acquired; and besides, you have the most accomplished of instructors close at hand."

"Who may that be?"

"Juliette. You laugh? Laughing is becoming to you. Laugh often!"

As she vanished up the stairs she cast back on him the prettiest smile he had received in a long while.

XIV.

ABOUT seven o'clock, as Forest had predicted, Fontenoy returned, in company with D'Argillesse. The latter had shed his rustic habiliments and manifested no evidence of having ever whipped a pool. As if this were the first time he had seen her since her arrival from Paris, he made a low bow before Edmee and asked her pardon for his unceremonious manner of presenting himself.

"Fontenoy wouldn't hear to my objections," he said; "that is why I offer my humble excuses, madame, for appearing here without your permission. I encountered him on the road—"

"As I told you you would do," Edmee interrupted, rather haughtily, raising her head.

"Then you have seen each other before to-day?" Fontenoy inquired with surprise.

"On the banks of the Nonnette, where M. d'Argillesse was fishing," she replied.

Gilbert would probably have manifested his astonishment that his friend had not informed him of the fact had not his attention been diverted to a subject of, to him, greater importance.

"Then it was you who shut that gate?" said he, not very pleasantly. "I broke my finger-

nails just now trying to get in. We had to tramp through the dust of the road away round to the main entrance. It was excessively annoying."

D'Argillesse kept his half-closed eyes bent on Edmee. She felt that she could not endure it much longer and must break out; but Forest came to her rescue.

"I am the guilty one," said he, "and I ask your pardon twice over, Fontenoy; first, for having caused you an unpleasant tramp, and secondly, for having usurped a privilege of ownership which I acknowledge to be unpardonable. But all I can say is that it's an old man's whim. At Cerisy the gates used to stand open in all trust and confidence, but I noticed that my finest peaches vanished from off the espaliers in broad daylight. There are poachers who are utterly devoid of scruples—in fact, poachers generally are apt to be unscrupulous. It was at that time that I contracted the reprehensible habit of shutting gates—not mine alone, but other peoples' also. Believe me, on this occasion I am unable to express my regret."

He rattled off his little speech with perfect ease, so that D'Argillesse, although he would have given considerable to know, could not say whether or not he spoke the truth. It was not a cheerful thought to him that possibly Forest had witnessed his attempt; but every culprit has a right to plead not guilty, and, moreover, of what could he be accused? And then, too, if

the worst came to the worst, men don't eat one another alive.

"I am sorry I mentioned the matter, if it was you," Fontenoy graciously remarked.

"I will have an extra key made," Edmee promptly said. "The comte is right. It won't do to allow a gate so remote from the house to remain unlocked. We should have no privacy at all."

Juliette made her appearance at this juncture, looking rather pale, but as wide awake as usual and in the best of spirits. The company took their places at table, and the incident appeared to be forgotten.

The next morning Edmee came downstairs bright and early. The sun had been up some time, however, and his rays, striking through the foliage, touched the tips of the herbage under the alder-bushes and imparted to them tints of vivid gold.

Mine. Fontenoy had seen but little of the country during her earlier years, and she was not imbued with that love of Nature which, with some, is a veritable passion, as strong and tender as the most profound of our affections; but she had an artistic perception of the beautiful. The sentiment that brought her out of doors that morning, however, was deeper than that which she experienced habitually.

After the events of the previous evening—as stupid and wearisome as the rehearsal of a play in which the actors have not mastered their parts and everything drags lamentably—she had

gone to bed, completely fagged out, utterly unable to reflect and analyze the situation. In the morning, soon as the birds began to twitter in their nests, she had awaked, clear of head and strong of body, with the impression that there had been a change, that something had happened which was to alter the whole course of her existence; something blithe and joy-inspiring, which impelled her to seek the sunshine and the blue sky. She experienced an imperious need to be alone in the open air, and to walk long and rapidly, by that means to increase her renovated vitality.

The sun was so hot, even at that early hour, that she sought the banks of the stream and the grateful shade of the tall poplars, whose leaves kept up an incessant murmuring above her head, as if they were whispering pleasant secrets to one another. She vainly questioned herself at first to ascertain what could be the reason of her light-heartedness. The rapidity of her movement, which afforded her a pleasure hitherto unknown to her, acted as an impediment to consecutive thought; but as she imperceptibly checked her speed, her ideas became more tranquil and orderly.

Truly something had risen in her life: a new star, that she had had a dim consciousness of, perhaps, but had never paused to contemplate. She loved her husband.

The sudden sensation of warmth that filled her heart had told her that Forest spoke the truth, and the power of love is such that, not-

withstanding the sorrows that the accession of this tyrant threatened, she was happy, so happy as to feel herself transfigured.

She loved her husband, and her husband did not love her. She was therefore to know the torments of jealousy, the pangs of despised love, that cruel craving for affection that nothing can assuage. It would be hard, very hard, and her suffering would be terrible. Be it so—but she would have lived!

Gilbert did not love her—that was true; but he had loved her—a little, at all events—in days gone by. Not with that exclusive affection which she now felt for him, but with a love which, if superficial, was none the less young and ardent. Well—for the heart of man is so constituted that, lacking realities, it can rest content with dreams and memories—she would gather up the remnants of her former happiness, and from the crumbs of that meal make for herself a new feast. And then old age was close at hand. Only a few years more—years of suffering and self-immolation, but few in number—and Gilbert, no longer young, renouncing pleasures that had forsaken him, would find it necessary to lead a tranquil, domestic life under the watchful care of a faithful attendant. It was then that his wife, his early, his constant friend, henceforth forever to be nothing more than friend—but incomparable and unrivaled in that more humble sphere—would create for him a soft warm nest of affection and surround with a balmy atmosphere of happiness that old,

fickle heart, content for the future to remain by the domestic hearth in a condition of moral well-being that no one save she could have afforded him.

“Oh, my Gilbert!” Edmee reflected; “what promise of a happy future old age has in store for us, when you shall have quieted down and I am no longer distracted by my foolish jealousy!”

And all at once this great truth dawned on Edmee; that youth is but a period of probation; that our years of strength and beauty are a preparation for those which come after them; and that, if we have led an upright life, when we reach the age of fifty a little happiness more or less in the past is a matter of trifling moment, provided our aspirations have been upward toward the rugged heights of virtue. On reaching that culminating point of existence our course lies onward across a level plain. The plain is as we ourselves have made it, either beset with stones and briers and bristling with difficulties, until the final plunge into the yawning gulf, or pleasant to the feet and carpeted with roses and violets, descending by an imperceptible slope to the Elysian Fields.

The *mondaine*, now that she was restored to woman's natural sphere, thirsted for a life of abnegation, of sacrifice, almost of physical pain; and she no longer viewed with apprehension the difficulties that lay before her. Even D'Argillesse lost his terrors and retreated into the

shadowy distance. Who could be a more effectual protector to her now than she herself? She dismissed from her mind the vexatious incident of the day before and her momentary weakness. Had she not been sufficiently punished by the horror she immediately felt? She was above such things, far above and beyond them, now!

When she came to the park gate she stopped and smiled at the thought which rose to her mind. It was a good and faithful gate, and had done its duty well. She tried to push back the bolt, but her efforts were unavailing. Anger had pushed it home; to draw it again would require more strength than lay in that small hand. Edmee returned to the house to give directions to summon a locksmith.

By this time the sun was high in the heavens. On her homeward way she met her husband.

Gilbert had not enjoyed so good a night's rest as his wife. As she had foreseen, Mme. Versey had asserted her influence over him again. It was in vain that he reasoned with himself; instinct impelled him toward the woman. He believed that he was strong enough not to become her slave, but knew he was weak enough to suffer deeply. What evil star had brought her there and set her down in the house of those worthy neighbors, who could not know her for what she was, and would, if she so desired, afford her every imaginable facility for perpetrating her nefarious designs? He had a qualm

of disgust at the thought that—if their relations had been what they once were—she would have taken advantage of her situation to appoint interviews with him. Then a reflection occurred to him which revealed a certain degree of perspicacity. Mme. Verseley was not there for him. For whom then was she there? For as for imagining that she was visiting the Frémonts to afford them pleasure—to play croquet, or to benefit by the country air—the case was not a supposable one.

He promised himself to keep an eye on her. In his present frame of mind to be able to visit his scorn on that woman—he knew her, but not as well as he should have known her by that time, it seems—and to assure himself that another man would soon be in the imbecile condition that he himself was in, would be an undeniable comfort.

Meditations like these were not calculated to impart a joyous expression to his countenance, and when he encountered his wife on the path that skirted the brink of the little stream, his face wore a very glum expression. Edmee had come to know him so thoroughly that she could read his thoughts in his looks as readily as one reads a sign. She stopped the melancholy promenade, moved thereto by a sentiment of pity and gentle irony.

“You are late in coming out for your walk, my friend,” she said to him. “An hour ago it was very pleasant here, but I can show you a

retreat where the heat has not penetrated yet. Come."

She took the lead and conducted him to a sort of grotto near the boundary wall. The great overhanging trees with their dense foliage, assisted by a musical little spring whose waters tumbled into a marble basin, diffused a most agreeable coolness. Two bamboo easy-chairs afforded a resting-place less frigid to the touch than the circular bench of granite—dear to our good ancestors, who, I fancy, built such things for ornament rather than for use.

"You will find it a comfortable place to meditate in, and also to smoke, if you should happen to feel like it," said Edmee; "but as it is my own private snugery, I will request you not to bring any one else here. That's all I ask of you."

"Are you going to leave me?" asked Gilbert, observing that she had turned to go.

She stopped. "I don't want to disturb your meditations," she said with covert raillery.

He looked at her, and was surprised to discover that she was so pretty, so gentle too, with her handsome golden-brown eyes that shone with a purposely softened flame. In her light morning gown of some diaphanous pink and white material, with a touch of lace and ribbon here and there to set it off, she appeared restful alike to eye and heart, a gracious, wholesome spectacle, fair to look upon.

"Disturb me?" he said. "What an idea! Stay where you are."

She came slowly back and seated herself on the other chair. For a moment that seemed rather long to them, they sat without speaking in the delicious coolness, surrounded on every side by the dense verdure, imprisoned, so to speak, save for a single vista of the river, with the gentle murmur of the spring escaping from the confinement of the basin.

“It is pleasant here,” said Fontenoy, yielding himself up to the charm of the time and place. “We did well to buy this property. Are you satisfied with it, Edmee?”

“Ever so much,” she answered in a low voice.

If he could but have known all that was contained in those three words, the change that the walls of the old mill had witnessed within the last few hours, the renewal of life and gladness in her! He would have been greatly surprised, perhaps ashamed, too, and angry with himself. It was not because he was incapable of it that he had failed to enter into her feelings and understand them. His thoughts had never turned in that direction. He looked at her again, and intuitively perceived that a metamorphosis had occurred in the woman who had been his wife, who was now only a member of his household.

“You are charming this morning,” said he. “The country agrees with you.”

She looked up in his face, and suddenly a feeling of dread passed over her, causing her to shiver as if a breath of cold air had touched her. Could it be that—repulsed by Mme. Verseley—

he was going to conceive a transitory caprice for her in the absence of something better! Truly, that would be an abominable thing! The great love that had so recently risen in her life could not be subjected to a sorer, a more humiliating trial. And on the other hand again, why should she wound the feelings of one who was paying her a friendly compliment? She remembered Comte Forest's advice to model herself on Célimène and summoned up her strength.

"One does one's best," she said, without looking at him.

A charming smile illuminated her countenance for an instant and vanished. Her husband was wonderstruck at the fleeting apparition. Twenty years of life in common necessarily result in a certain measure of brother and sisterly familiarity; even when the pair do not look at each other they can't help seeing each other every day, and sometimes they rub shoulders. Gilbert captured one of the fluttering ribbons that a stray puff of wind brought within his grasp.

"Your best is very agreeable," he said. "It seems to me that Forest is making love to you?"

"Why, of course he is!" she replied.

"He is a very sensible man. One of these days I think I shall follow his example."

"Oh, no! not you!" Edmee exclaimed, rising. She tempered with a smile the apparent rudeness of her speech. "I am going to see if Juliette is awake," she said.

She left the grotto, abandoning Gilbert to his

reflections, which were not long in reverting to Mme. Verseley and his own trials and tribulations.

There were high jinks constantly under way at the feudal castle of the Frémonts. Following the teachings of several illustrious philosophers, Enguerrande and Maguelonne regarded life in the light of a round of duties which it is permitted no one to shirk. But then those duties consisted in industrious and unintermitting application to the exercise of various games and pastimes, whose paramount importance no one might safely venture to impugn who was invited to take part in them. D'Argillesse, having been presented to the family by Fontenoy at his own request, had immediately become an indispensable wheel in the machinery.

Under his easy-going manner he possessed a power of endurance almost as great as that of the Frémont girls. From morning till night he could be seen, with equal indifference and absence of effort, alternately playing billiards and tennis, fencing, or driving a four-in-hand, constantly employing a wrist whose sinewy strength no one would have predicted from looking at his irreproachable white hands.

Fontenoy was surprised. He had never suspected that his new friend was a man of so many and so radically different accomplishments, and he suddenly became aware that what he knew of him was very little. A certain amount of curiosity supplemented the in-

terest with which he regarded him, and the result was another discovery: that D'Argillesse's charm was entirely superficial, and vanished as soon as one endeavored to account for it. The man was like a wall concealed behind sumptuous hangings of silk and velvet. Raise the curtain, and the obstacle stood revealed, hard, cold and impenetrable.

It gave him a disagreeable shock, for Fontenoy was extremely good-hearted. Under the thin varnish of cynicism appropriate to the man of fashion, was concealed, as was not in D'Argillesse's case, a very feeling and sympathetic nature. Edmee was a liberal contributor to half a dozen charities; but Fontenoy cheerfully assisted a long list of pensioners, old servants, former comrades who had come to want, and his benefactions were concealed so studiously that even his wife did not know of them. To a man of such dispositions D'Argillesse's views could not but be repugnant.

"I have made a mistake," he said to himself.

Whatever our endowments may be, we all give ourselves credit for our ability to read the characters of our fellow-men, and it is excessively disagreeable to find we have been mistaken in our judgments. Accordingly, Fontenoy's first impulse was one of ill-humor.

Gilbert was at bottom nothing more than a great spoiled child; for life had always been kind to him, and he had never been disciplined by the lessons of adversity. His experience of the world, too, had been entirely superficial.

He had lived in a sort of comfortable dream, which in no wise precluded the most agreeable realities. His friends were, for the most part, the friends of his youth, and the acquaintances he had made in society were men uninfluenced by motives of interest, on whom he could depend implicitly. And now to them came D'Argillesse, a man of a different stripe, concealing beneath his garments of most recent style an element of mystery.

Fontenoy resolved that he would watch him, and all at once it occurred to him that his wife had never seemed to share his liking for the stranger.

"I will ask her why," he said to himself. "She must have a reason. She is a woman of good sound sense and always knows what she is doing."

Fabien Malvois had at last made his appearance on the scene under Comte Forest's auspices. Juliette had received him very pleasantly, but if she was stirred by any emotion more profound than usual, she had not given visible sign of it. Since her return from Vichy, moreover, she had not seemed like herself: she was less gay than was her wont, her sarcasm was perhaps more cutting, she appeared preoccupied, and at times melancholy. Still, she was always present on field-days at the fortress, and sometimes took part in them, but did not display the enthusiasm that she infused into her dancing in the winter season.

Fabien on his arrival had been confiscated by

Maguelonne, who never failed to appropriate to herself every male specimen of humanity over sixteen and under sixty, so that opportunities for sustained conversation were not over-abundant in their almost daily reunions; and this afforded another reason for Juliette's taciturnity.

"I don't know you any more," Edmee said to her one day. "Is this my Juliette, or is it some other girl whom they have sent back to me from the Clocher?"

"Perhaps your Juliette is not 'what a credulous generation thinks!'" she replied. "Don't you remember the story of the parrot who for two years never once opened his mouth and then suddenly astounded his contemporaries by giving to the world a vocabulary as extensive as it was unexpected? How do you know that I am not the counterpart of that learned and sagacious bird?"

"Go two years without speaking?" said Gilbert, who chanced to pass at that moment. "I defy you to do it!"

"You know nothing at all about it, uncle," Juliette rejoined. "I don't tell everything I think, or everything I see."

Fontenoy was amused. "You surprise me more and more!" he said. "What have you seen so extraordinary of late?"

"Not much to speak of here. But at the castle— Where can your eyes be, uncle, if you have seen nothing?"

Neither of her relatives could induce her to say what she had seen. She was silent with an obstinacy that was unusual with her. Finally, wearying of the conflict, she came out with the following declaration:

“For my part, I am thoroughly disgusted! It’s astonishing the way you respectable people allow the wool to be pulled over your eyes! You haven’t so very much to boast of, though, uncle, in the way of respectability! With auntie the case is different. But you! you ought to know better! Well, it’s no business of mine; but, if there’s a gentleman on the face of the earth whom I can’t endure, it’s that M. d’Argillesse.”

“Has he been making love to you?” asked Fontenoy.

“To *me*? I’d like to see him try it once!”

And that was all they could elicit from her.

All the next day a fine and penetrating rain fell without intermission on the scorched and yellow fields, which were sadly in need of it. Overheated nature seemed to be giving herself a resting spell, and the grateful humidity that filled the air predisposed every one to a delicious indolence.

The sky, so far from being somber, was of a delicate shade of gray, shot, one felt, by the unseen rays of a sun that was still very near our globe. It rained, and yet the impression was not one of either melancholy or weariness. Every one knew that behind that thin curtain of mist there was fine weather, and that the

blue sky was only awaiting the caprice of the wind to show itself.

Juliette and her aunt, seated on the covered bridge with all the windows on one side thrown wide open, were looking out on the leaves, bright as if they had just been given a coat of varnish, dripping with the impalpable moisture that had been bathing them since the morning. The tall cat-tails in the brook bowed their fuzzy heads under the accumulated weight of water. Everything had a relaxed, languid air that impressed one with a sensation of voluptuousness.

"I suppose uncle is over at the castle again?" said Juliette. After one or two desultory attempts to be industrious she had allowed her work to fall to the floor and had proceeded to make herself comfortable in a big bamboo easy-chair. "I should like to know what he can find there to amuse him."

"He is playing billiards with M. Frémont, who is bent on making up the points your uncle gave him the last time they played," Edmee replied.

Being more diligent than her niece, she continued her work; but with a moderation consistent with the condition of the atmosphere.

"I wonder what Mme. Verseley is doing. Hid away in some corner, most likely, with somebody making love to her. Aunt, do you like M. d'Argillesse?"

The question was so unexpected that Edmee could feel the blood rise to her cheeks. Ever since the incident of the gate the handsome

angler, who had ceased to angle, had been more reserved in his manner; and moreover, he had never had an opportunity of being alone in her company. But his way of looking at her when he thought he was not likely to be observed, proved clearly enough that he had not abandoned the pursuit.

"No," said she, looking at her niece, who, with head erect, was waiting for her answer; "no, I don't like him one bit."

"Why do you receive him, then?"

"It is your uncle's wish."

"Is there no way of sending him about his business?"

"How could I? It is not customary to send about his business, as you express it, a man against whom there is no reproach to make.

"And have you no reproach to make against him, aunt?" asked Juliette, still with the same fearless look.

"Not otherwise than that I don't like him," Edmee replied, not a little ashamed of her evasiveness.

"Well, *I* have a complaint to make against him if you have not!" the girl said with warmth. "I am angry with him for the blackguard, brutal way in which he pursues you with his attentions. No decent man looks at a respectable woman as he looks at you. Sometimes I have seen him watching you, and I have felt like slapping his face!"

Edmee bent over her niece and kissed her on the forehead. "You are a good girl," she said.

"But among the people we mix with it is sometimes best to pay no attention to such things. They are only deserving of our contempt."

Juliette shook her head with an air of resolution and disapprobation. "When I am married," she said, "if my husband brings men of that stripe to the house, I'll soon give him to understand that they are not wanted there; let them keep to their club. I won't have wolves introduced into my sheepfold—it's too much honor for them."

While his niece was enunciating her theories, Fontenoy was making discoveries. As the weather did not permit of outdoor recreations, all the visitors at the feudal castle were assembled in the billiard-room.

This was a spacious apartment, which had originally been intended to serve the purpose of an orangery, but Enguerrande had taken possession of it and converted it into a sort of athletic clubhouse for rainy days. A little of everything was to be found in it, even comfortable seats and convenient screens. The latter invention was Maguelonne's. She was forever peeping behind those screens in the hope to find there the offer of marriage that was bound to come some day or other. Some women, they say, prepare their fall. Maguelonne was preparing her ascent to the Paradise of married women.

Fontenoy was playing a listless game of billiards with the master of the house, D'Argillesse, and two gentlemen of the neighborhood. The ladies were watching them with languid

interest, excepting Maguelonne, for whom the proceedings of a bachelor were always interesting. Mme. Verseley came in, her lithe form advantageously displayed by an elegant close-fitting gown of some inconspicuous shade. She made the circuit of the billiard-table with great deliberation, stopping at every step she took, and finally settled down in front of Fontenoy, on a high bench that permitted her to overlook the game.

Gilbert watched her movements with the rather sickly interest that we manifest for a person of whom we are a bit afraid. And then those movements, so supple, so seductive, troubled him still, do what he might. When she was seated, he gave a look at the sober-hued dress, further set off at neck and wrists by lace ruffles of an exquisite reddish shade, and suddenly stood as if petrified, his eyes as big as saucers.

"It's your shot, Fontenoy," D'Argillesse said to him.

Fontenoy fired away mechanically, sending his ball careering aimlessly round the table, and turned his eyes again upon his quondam friend. Nestling among the lace ruffles gleamed a pin that was not unknown to him: two small diamonds connected by a thin chain of gold. Those two diamonds, that flashed intermittently in unison with the laze breathing of their owner, Mme. Verseley had never worn in times gone by except to notify the acceptance of a rendezvous. He had looked for them often

enough with feverish impatience, had discovered them often enough with rapturous joy among the complicated bedizenment of her attire, to know them again after many years; and it was not so very long since those twin stars of evil omen had shed their light for him.

With that keenness of intuition that comes to us all at once in the great crises of our lives, Gilbert looked around the room. There should be another signal displayed; but how was he to recognize it? He had not long to seek. Mme. Verseley had not bothered herself to tax her invention. What had served in Fontenoy's case would answer for another. The selfsame pink that had served to announce their mutual understanding now adorned the buttonhole of D'Argillesse's sack coat.

The blood rushed to Fontenoy's head, there was a furious ringing in his ears. With unsteady steps he made his way to the glazed door, saying:

"It is stifling here!"

Enguerrande had already darted forward and thrown open the two leaves. A current of moist air, heavy with the emanations of the garden, swept like a benediction through the orangery and every one breathed more freely. Perched on her lofty bench as if it had been a throne, Mme. Verseley indifferently contemplated her submissive lieges. Her eyes encountered Fontenoy's, which surveyed her with crushing scorn and wrath unutterable. Her eyelids did

not droop, nor did her peachy cheeks become one single shade redder or whiter under that appalling look. Hers seemed to reply: "What business is it of yours? Am I not my own mistress? And you, if you could but know how little account I make of you!" The esteem of a gallant man, indeed, had not a feather's weight in influencing the appreciations of a woman of Mme. Verseley's stamp.

Fontenoy returned to the table and went on with his game, but allowed himself to be scandalously beaten by old Frémont, who crowed loud and long over such an unexpected piece of luck. Gilbert might have taken his departure after that, but he did not choose to do so; he preferred to stay and fathom the mystery.

And might it not be the effect of chance, pure and simple, after all? Why should not Mme. Verseley wear her little pin, and why should not D'Argillesse deck his coat with a pink at a season when pinks are abundant? The fact might have some significance in winter; but in the month of August? Juliette was right in her declaration that people delight in having the wool pulled over their eyes. At that moment Fontenoy was applying an entire fleece to his organs of perception. Mme. Frémont took it on her to remove it.

"Is it to-morrow or the day after that you are going up to Paris, my dear?" she asked Mme. Verseley.

"The day after, my dear madame," the other replied, and the twin diamonds on her bosom

flashed as she turned with indolent grace toward the old lady.

"Then you'll match those skeins of wool for me, won't you?"

"If you desire it," was the nonchalant reply.

This should have been enough to enlighten Fontenoy. He was not overanxious to be convinced, however. Turning abruptly to D'Argillesse, he said to him:

"You were speaking of taking horseback exercise. Have you abandoned the idea?"

"By no means," replied D'Argillesse, who was practicing cushion shots with a single ball. "I shall run up to Paris to-morrow afternoon to give orders for sending down my saddle. Millot promises to have a mount ready for me next week. We can have some pleasant rides together if you feel inclined. But it won't interfere with our game of tennis, mademoiselle, for I shall be back early, day after to-morrow morning."

This last remark was addressed to Maguelonne, who had opened her mouth preparatory to protesting. D'Argillesse then turned deliberately to Fontenoy. Their glances met, and in his friend's inscrutable eyes Gilbert could see the wall which barred the way to all investigation.

"Let's see," D'Argillesse continued, "who is there about here that keeps horses? We must get up a big riding party; it's the stupidest thing in the world, for there's always certain

to be a horse in the troop that kicks or has a vice of some kind. Still, it amuses the ladies."

They set to work to count up the riders of their neighborhood. Owing to the proximity of Chantilly there was quite a number of men who owned stables within a narrow radius, and it would be an easy matter to bring together a dozen well-mounted men and women for a pleasure ride.

"We had better wait until the weather is a little cooler," D'Argillesse resumed, "and then, too, I shall be glad to have a chance to try that jumping mare of Millot's. She's a fine creature, but they say her temper is none too good. Mme. Fontenoy does not ride, I think?" he added, turning to Gilbert; "nor Mdlle. Chas-sagny, either?"

"My niece is a good horsewoman, and so is my wife, for that matter, but I think she has lost her liking for the exercise. It is long since she has been in the saddle."

"Perhaps she will feel like trying it again."

"As to that I cannot say," Fontenoy replied, with more curtness than he was wont to infuse into his answers.

The moisture still continued to drip upon the paths from the drooping branches, heavy with their weight of water; but the sun was shining forth from behind a cloud that was like a veil of tulle laced with gold. Alleging some pretext, Gilbert took his departure. As he pursued his way, he vainly tried to think. The more he

endeavored to fix his thoughts the more they seemed to fly from him. They slipped from him like elusive serpents and hid in the tangled thicket.

When he reached home he at first thought he would go to his room, where he could be alone and reflect on his discomfiture and mental distress. Then a longing for consolation and words of comfort induced him to seek his wife's society. She had always been so good, so "nice" to him; surely she would have some pleasant words to say. She was a born comforter, was Edmee; he had found that out when he was sick. He had a dim consciousness that his impressions of the present moment were very like those that he had experienced on emerging from that other serious trouble.

Everything seemed to favor his designs: Juliette was writing to her mother, Edmee was alone in the small drawing-room. With his firm step, a little less elastic than it had been that morning, Fontenoy came forward and seated himself in a deep fauteuil, facing his wife's low chair, near a window.

One swift glance sufficed to show Mme. Fontenoy that her husband had been passing through a disagreeable experience. She did not expect that he would tell her what was the nature of it, and yet Gilbert's face had not the close and secretive expression that she was only too accustomed to behold on it.

"Well," she said, "have you been enjoying yourself?"

"No," he replied, in a voice that gave her pain, "I let old Frémont beat me."

"Why, that was an act of charity! You ought to feel quite proud of it."

He gave her a mournful look, as if to reproach her for her keen irony. She left her chair and came a little nearer to him.

"Come," she continued, persuasively; "tell me the news. What is going on? Has Maguelonne succeeded in finding a lover?"

"No. Poor Maguelonne, I'm sorry for her. She's a good girl!"

"I'll not dispute it. Fabien Malvois wasn't there, was he?"

"No."

"Who *was* there?"

"The two Duparcs, Ormant and his wife, three gentlemen from Chantilly, strangers to me—"

"Is that all?"

"And D'Argillesse."

He spoke the name as if against his will. Edmee looked at her husband closely, fearing he might have received some inkling of the man's proceedings toward her. But he was not thinking of her; he was thinking with bitterness of Mme. Verseley. He pulled himself together and continued:

"Queer fellow, that D'Argillesse. One can never tell what he is thinking of."

"Perhaps that is because he doesn't mean all he says."

"Do you think so? Perhaps it is also because he doesn't say all he means."

"Both."

There was silence after this word, which Edmee enunciated with great distinctness.

"I thought you liked him?" Fontenoy presently said:

"I? Not a bit of it. And no more does Juliette."

"I thought!" Gilbert absently went on. "What a queer thing society is, anyway! Two people meet every day, they fancy they know each other, and lo and behold! they find they are as much strangers as they were in the beginning."

"Has he been doing something to annoy you?" asked Mme. Fontenoy in a tone almost of indifference.

"Not a bit of it. But there are days when one seems to be more sensitive than on others, and to-day I found him less agreeable. There is something mysterious about him."

"Have less to do with him," Edmee urged. "I should be glad, so far as I am concerned."

"I believe that is good advice," Gilbert replied.

His voice had a mournful sound, his eyes roved vacantly about the small apartment. His wife felt how deep was his craving for sympathy and words of kindness. Her sight was dim with the tears that her compassion and abundant goodness sent welling upward to her eyes, but she repressed them.

"My poor Gilbert," said her gentle heart,

"they have ill-used him, and I have no word of comfort for him! What can they have been doing to him?"

An intuition of the truth suddenly flashed across Edmee's mind, arousing one of those pardonable impulses of wrath and hate toward her pretty, viperous rival that cause the blood to boil and the cheeks to tingle.

"Was Mme. Verseley there?" she asked.

"Of course."

Fontenoy had averted his eyes in answering. If she had dared she would have gone to him, taken his hands in hers, and said to him: "Look me in the eyes, confess your fault and what it has cost you, tell me the evil she has done you, so that I may console you with all the tenderness and all the loyalty of my loving heart!" But the effort was beyond her strength. She was forced to take refuge in generalities.

"You were quite right, my friend," she said, in more decided accents, "in declaring that society is a queer affair. No matter how different persons may be in character and disposition, we constantly see those who do not know them measuring them by the same standard. When I hear an estimate of that sort expressed I often feel like laughing, and again, it makes me very angry. For instance, now, there are two persons who ought to understand each other, if any two persons in the world do. I mean M. d'Argillesse and Mme. Verseley.

Gilbert turned toward her as if he had received an electric shock.

"If they had married each other," Edmee continued, "I believe that they would have been perfectly matched. Their views of life are almost identically the same; they love no one but themselves—"

"How happens it that you know them so well?" asked Fontenoy, profoundly astonished.

"I judge him by what he says, and her by what she does. Neither of them has the least particle of feeling. They are creatures who, to achieve their end, would not hesitate an instant to bring down ruin and suffering on their best friends. I am afraid of such people, and I shun them. It seems to me that no good can result from their companionship."

"They are what we call egotists," Gilbert remarked, reflectively.

"They are something worse than that, my friend. An egotist is one whose sole aim is his own pleasure or profit; but he does not necessarily seek these to the detriment of others; while that person, the lady of whom I'm speaking, I'm convinced experiences a keen pleasure in the thought that she has been the cause of suffering."

Fontenoy made no answer. His old wound had commenced to bleed again, and like one with an internal hemorrhage, he felt himself slowly suffocating.

"I can understand that natures such as those are repugnant to you, Edmee," he said, at last. "You are goodness personified."

His head had grown so heavy that he was

unable longer to sustain its weight. He let it sink upon his chest.

"Do you feel badly?" Edmee inquired, rising and going toward him.

"I have only a headache. It's this weather—"

He was very pale. She came nearer to him.

"Would you like to have me rub your forehead?" said she. "My hands are cool."

Without waiting for his answer she placed herself behind his chair, rested his head against a bosom within which a heart was beating more tumultuously than it was wont to do, and applied her firm, gratefully cool hands to his throbbing temples.

"Does that give you comfort?" she asked.]

"Ever so much. I thank you."

She stood there for a while, scarce daring to breathe, fearing he would notice the quickened pulsations of that heart which was unreservedly his. Gradually her fear subsided and her tranquillity returned to her. Her hands were becoming warm, too. She changed their position, and her own bosom was penetrated by that sensation of well-being with which she had inspired another. Presently Gilbert's more regular respiration announced that he was suffering less, and she took away her hands. He raised his head and appeared to be himself again.

"I thank you," he said. "I feel a great deal better. I was aware what a capital nurse you are, Edmee, but I did not know that you were a magician."

He smiled at the recollection of the nights and days she had spent at his bedside, and sought his wife's eyes, but she was looking elsewhere.

"You nursed me," he went on, "with a devotion that I remember with a gratitude much more easy to imagine than to express. Did I ever tell you so?"

"No," she murmured.

"Then I was very remiss, and I beg you to forgive me. It was often in my mind, but that was not enough."

"It was quite sufficient," she replied, gaining courage to turn her eyes on him.

"I do not agree with you. I should have told you of it in words; but my convalescence was slow, and sick people are always ungrateful. No sooner is their health restored to them than their sole thought is to get back to the pleasures of existence, like schoolboys longing to be off to their sports."

"And sometimes we are not as prudent as we should be," Edmee gently said.

"I don't think I was imprudent; but it can't be denied that my health is not what it was. I have you by me, fortunately."

He put out his hand; she placed hers in it, and he imprinted on it a warm kiss that contained an abundant measure of sincere gratitude.

"It is very absurd, perhaps," said he, with an emotion greater than he would have cared to let her see, "but just now, while you were rubbing my temples, I felt my ingratitude as

keenly as a remorse. There is another thing, too, for which I have never thanked you—”

She had a presentiment of what he was about to say, and stopped him with a motion of her hand. She longed eagerly to hear him say it, and yet was afraid.

“I will speak, nevertheless. It was the day when I asked you to burn—”

“Say no more,” said she in a low tone.

“Yes; I must. What you did that day was worthy of an honest man, my dear wife. It was a fine action—there are very few wives whom a husband could have asked to do such a thing.”

“It was a simple matter,” she replied. “What one can ask of an honest man he can equally well ask of an honest woman, I suppose. You had rendered services to others of which you did not wish to leave behind you any record which might be disagreeable to the recipients—it was thus that I interpreted the affair. There was nothing that called for thanks from you. Am I not your wife? But even had fate decreed that you were not to survive, you might have rested perfectly assured in mind. You might have been certain that every scrap of paper that had not some bearing on our common interests, that did not relate directly to you and me, would have been destroyed, and that without my even dreaming of reading it.”

Edmee's hand was not very far away. He bent forward and regained possession of it. Shutting his eyes to imprison there a tear

that was endeavoring to escape, he kissed it a second time with the same fervor as before, then released it.

Edmee returned to her low chair and he composed himself comfortably in the fauteuil, where presently he fell asleep, with an expression on his face of peace and trustfulness. Then, while her work, which she had taken up again but left untouched, fell to the floor, Mme. Fontenoy directed her gaze on her husband; her hands came together slowly in an attitude of prayer, and with tearful eyes, her heart full of unutterable pity, she contemplated him for a long, long time.

XV.

As Fontenoy had foreseen, Mme. Verseley left for Paris by the early train, and D'Argillesse, returning that same day soon after breakfast, was enabled to participate in Maguelonne's game of tennis. No one could have suspected that those two planets, apparently so distant from each other, had been in conjunction in the intervening time.

Mme. Verseley did not make her appearance until evening, shortly before dinner-time. She was perfectly cool and self-possessed, and brought back with her a multitude of small purchases, commissions which she had been

given to execute by the inhabitants of the feudal castle; which, to one who knew as much as Fontenoy did, showed her to be an expeditious woman of business. Gilbert, still weak and consumed by the desire—that often besets us so inopportunately—of probing disagreeable matters to the bottom, had insisted on spending his evening at the Frémont's and taking with him Edmee, who docilely submitted to all his plans. Perhaps she also harbored a secret wish to see with her own eyes what it was that had so broken up her husband.

She saw nothing, but she divined everything. The innocent allusions made by third parties to the little journeys of the pair would have instructed her as to the truth, even had she suspected nothing.

“The folks here must be stone-blind,” she said to herself; “or else profoundly engrossed with their own affairs, to see nothing of this flirtation!”

D'Argillesse seemed as completely at his ease as Mme. Verseley herself, and that is saying not a little. Fontenoy even felt a little abashed in his presence, owing to the same causes perhaps that made Edmee hold aloof from the pretty viper. But Gilbert was sufficiently a man of the world to overcome his repugnance. Besides, a moment's reflection showed him that he had no real grievance against D'Argillesse. The latter had been guilty of no underhand practices, had done his friend no substantial injury. It was not the fault of the present

favorite if Fontenoy had ceased to please. There was no reason to suspect that the rupture with Gilbert was at all owing to any interference on the part of his more fortunate rival. Whatever reason, therefore, he might have for changing his attitude toward D'Argillesse, he had no pretext for outwardly manifesting his new sentiments.

Mme. Fontenoy was wondering how D'Argillesse would comport himself toward her. It was sheer simplicity on her part: nothing was changed, why should he alter his behavior? Edmee's uprightness revolted at the spectacle of such impudence, and all her honest soul went out in a festival of thanksgiving for that which it pleased her to consider a little less than miraculous deliverance. Forest, in showing her what were her true sentiments toward her husband, had hardly done her a more important service than D'Argillesse himself when he presented himself before her without his mask. But the two of them together had undeniably saved her from the peril of yielding, in her moment of exasperation and vexation, to an impulse of coquetry for which, however venial it might have been, she would have now been doing penance in sackcloth and ashes.

D'Argillesse wore his usual manner when he approached Mme. Fontenoy. Since the day of their encounter beside the Nonnette they had had no opportunity of conversing with each other at length. Edmee, although she was troubled with a certain amount of curiosity, had no desire for

the interview which he was bent on compassing. He felt that he had been thoroughly discomfited on that occasion, and was not the kind of man to sit down tamely under a repulse. Profiting by a moment when she and Mme. Frémont were alone together, he went and took a seat near them, assured that the worthy lady would take advantage of his presence to go and superintend her domestic arrangements. The event showed that his prevision was correct. When they were alone and their voices were covered by the usual droning accompaniment of laughter and conversation, he contemplated with stealthy attention the woman who had escaped him by an unlooked-for effort of her will.

In the opinion of that subduer of female hearts the coldness that she had since that time evinced toward him could not proceed from a sentiment of offended delicacy. What then could be the cause that had effected such a revolution in Mme. Fontenoy's ideas? If he was forced to acknowledge himself beaten, he desired at least to know to what he was to attribute his defeat. But Edmee was impenetrable. With a polite smile, more chilling even than an open declaration of hostility, she listened without interrupting him, than which nothing is more calculated to cool one's ardor. Under the stimulus of his vexation and disappointment he grew warmer, coming back to his pet theories, urging the flight of time, the hollowness of an old age that has no memories to revert to. She allowed him to go on until he had

exhausted his arguments, with no other sign that she heard than an occasional look directed upon the specious pleader.

"But I see," said he, at last, piqued by this attitude of hers, "that for the last fifteen minutes our conversation has been a monologue, and I fear I have bored you mercilessly. Pardon a philosopher who is infatuated with his doctrines."

"Not at all; it is very entertaining," Edmee replied. "It is a conception of life that I have heard you expound before, but seldom with such eloquence. It interests me the more that it opens up before me, I must confess, entirely new horizons, to which my prosaic understanding finds it somewhat difficult to accommodate itself. You will forgive my ignorance, however, which must appear to you ridiculous in a woman whose day for asking such simple questions has long gone by. What happens when an agreeable man—one of your fellow disciples in philosophy, we'll say, for instance—attempts to instruct two women at the same time in his ethical doctrines?"

The thrust told. D'Argillesse was stung to the quick. Could it be that beneath her outward appearance of simplicity, Edmee concealed such rare perspicacity? That was probably the solution of the problem, for as he had intrusted his secret to no one, therefore no one could have betrayed him. Be that as it might, his overthrow was complete and irremediable. He would not admit it, however, without first inflicting on his adversary a wound that she would be likely to

remember. Bowing slightly with ironical politeness, he replied, in a low voice:

“A man never says such things to two women at the same time, dear madame. One of them stands for the past, or, at best, the present; for her there is no further need of explanations. The other is the future. She is our hope. Is it not permissible to expose to her our inmost thoughts?”

Edmee's face became very pale, and she rose to leave her insolent persecutor. Juliette, who had been keeping an eye on her, came up to her support.

“Monsieur,” she said, with an air of innocence, “I understand that Mme. Verseley was looking for you just now.”

“I will use all diligence in finding her, mademoiselle,” he said, and took himself away.

Mme. Fontenoy resumed her seat. She was trembling with anger, and could hardly hold herself erect. Her niece stood before her to shield her from the glances of the curious.

“I have just gained for myself two lifelong enemies,” the young girl tranquilly said.

“Who, pray?” asked Edmee, recovering her self-control.

“Why, *that* gentlemanly individual and Mme. Verseley, of course.”

“How?”

“Oh, easily enough. It was all a fib; Mme. Verseley had not asked for him. Catch her asking for him! She knows a little too much

for that. But I wanted to release you from his attentions."

The eyes of the two women met. Mme. Fontenoy knew not what to say, so false the situation was.

"I am not a little child, auntie," Juliette went on, in a protecting tone. "We'll admit that I ought to make believe I am densely ignorant of the things I ought not to know, but that's only when there are people about; between you and me, it isn't necessary, is it? I have been watching their goings on this long time. They are none of my business, and they don't interest me. But the moment that gentleman begins to annoy you, he'll find he has me to deal with!"

It was a pretty sight to see her playing the role of small protectress. Her bright, vigilant black eyes rested on Mme. Fontenoy with motherly tenderness, and the red that flamed in her cheeks with a deeper intensity than usual lent her a singular attractiveness. Edmee, while laying her own caressing fingers on the small, cool hand, in token of her thanks, regretted that Fabien was not there to see. Presently she caught sight of him at the far end of the room, and beckoned him to come to her. He obeyed forthwith, and with the two young folks beside her she felt at ease once more.

"I thought we were never going to see you again," she said, smiling pleasantly at the young man. "When you stay away we miss you."

"You are too kind! I only wish it were in

my power to show myself deserving of such flattering words. What can I do to merit them?"

"Go and get a cup of tea for my aunt and a glass of orangeade for me, if you please," said Juliette; "then we'll see if there's anything else to do."

When he had departed the young girl said, under her breath:

"Why do you insist on announcing to the world an engagement which as yet has neither form nor substance?"

"Is that as far as it has got?" asked Edmee, gazing admiringly on her niece's pretty face.

"Why, yes! We'll speak of the matter later, when we get home; here the walls have ears, to say nothing of your messenger. Dear me, how he has hurried! Here he is back again, and hasn't spilled a drop, either. What marvelous dexterity! Are you aware, sir, that if we should have a panic, you might earn an honest living by acting as assistant to a prestidigitator? I verily believe that you are capable of spiriting Mme. Fremont away in a cocked hat, should the necessity arise."

Whereon she flew away to claim her share in the dance which Enguerrande had promised them, provided some one could be found to take turns with her at the piano. And all the rest of the evening she could be seen flitting here and there, bright, gay, and full of animal spirits, as if her young head had never known what it was to harbor a serious thought.

When the time came for them to go home, Ed-

mee went to her husband where he was standing conversing animatedly with some of their neighbors, and touched him softly on the shoulder. He started, but his face brightened as he recognized her. A moment later the three of them were walking on the level road, beneath the rays of a slender moon, sufficient to indicate their way to them, but not bright enough to cast their shadows on it. The night was still and very mild.

“Ah!” said Juliette, as they entered the grounds of La Tremblaye, “I’m glad to get back; after all, ‘there’s no place like home.’ It’s very strange, this is a mill, and I can live in it and be perfectly at peace; while the Fremonts’ place is a fortress, and one would declare it was a mill; the floors seem to tremble and the whole building to vibrate. Good-night, uncle; good-night, aunt!”

Fontenoy lingered a moment, contemplating the tall trees slumbering in the mellow light.

“What she says is true,” said he; “the scene is calm and restful—like yourself, dear Edmee. Sleep well; I can hardly keep my eyes open.”

The next morning Juliette went and knocked at the door of her aunt’s dressing-room. The hour and the place were greatly affected by them both for their secret conferences. She selected a comfortable seat, deliberately folded her hands, and said:

“Aunt, it is my belief that my marriage is going to be a flash in the pan.”

“Why, Juliette!” exclaimed Mme. Fontenoy,

with consternation. "I thought you had come to tell me that it was all arranged."

"No, my dear aunt, we are not on the direct road to the altar. It seems that I don't suit M. Malvois."

Edmee turned so as to face her niece, and looked her straight in the eyes. "Can't you see that he is so in love with you that he has lost his appetite for meat and drink?"

"His eating I cannot vouch for; I pay no attention to his performances in that line. But as for his drinking, did I not with my own eyes, last night, behold him dispose of two glasses of lemonade, one after the other, that were handed him by Maguelonne?"

"Can it be that you are suffering from an attack of jealousy?" asked Mme. Fontenoy.

"*You* have never been jealous, my dear aunt, I suppose?"

Edmee gave a retrospective glance among her memories—not too profoundly, however—and was silent. But her niece was not to be disposed of so easily.

"You never have been jealous? Then you should say so; for in that case, don't you know, you are deserving of a reward—the order of Agricultural Merit, at the very least. Well, grant that I am jealous; what's the harm in it?"

With her arms folded tight across her bosom, and her head thrown slightly back, she looked with an air of comical defiance at her aunt, who could not refrain from laughing.

"I see no harm in it," she replied; "it proves that you love M. Malvois, and as that is what I desire most of all—"

"Love him!" said Juliette, uncrossing her arms. "Perhaps that is stating the case a little too broadly. But I don't like to see him too polite to some one else."

"You are an out and out monopolist! What will you do when you are married?"

"Oh, when I'm married I shan't care so much. There will be occasions when I can have him to myself. Even when people are married, they are alone together *once* in a while, aren't they? I am not speaking of the country, or when they are away traveling. But even at Paris they have some moments to devote to each other, and those are the times when I'll bring my husband to the confessional—when I'll worm out of him his most secret thoughts. But you don't put yourself in my place, as you ought to do, kindest of aunts. A poor little maiden on the lookout for a husband, what is to become of her if the gentleman who proposes to marry her pays her no attention?"

"While you are about it, you may as well confess, too, that you do not extend much encouragement to M. Malvois."

"You want me to encourage him? And I who have all along been afraid of shocking your sense of the proprieties. Never mind! I'll encourage him—see if I don't! With the authorization of the constituted authorities, as they say down at the town hall—"

"Not so fast, Juliette! You must not forget that—"

"—from the battlements of their fortress all the Fremonts are looking down on us! I'll try to bear it in mind. But, then, you must grant us a little tête-à-tête—just the tiniest bit of a tête-à-tête. You are altogether too watchful, Aunt Edmee, if you'll permit me to say so. I've seen the time, here in this very room, not long ago, when I thought I should have to ask you to sit down at the piano and play us a waltz—people can talk while they are waltzing. But you wouldn't have done it, I know you wouldn't."

"That you can rest assured of!" Edmee replied. "And what do you propose to say to him, in this tête-à-tête?"

"Now, auntie, that is no concern of yours! It is me whom he is going to marry, not you!"

"Still—"

"I'll swear to you to be perfectly decorous. Come, what shall I swear it on?"

"Swear not at all; it is needless. Well, as he is to dine with us this evening, we'll get up a rubber of whist, Comte Forest, your uncle and I—with a dummy."

"Oh, you darling aunt! You must let me hug you! There, I have mussed your hair; fix it up again. That's it; now you are as beautiful as an angel. And please consider how nice it is of me to tell you so, when I have obtained what I asked for, and there is nothing more to be got from you."

An hour or so after dinner Edmee, mindful of

her promise, summoned Forest and her husband to the whist-table.

"I thought you did not care for cards?" remarked her old friend, as he came forward in obedience to her call.

"I don't, but we must do something for the children's sake," she replied.

"The children" were seated not far away in a cosy corner favorable to confidential converse, fenced in by a table on which was a high lamp. Two easy-chairs, sufficiently near each other to encourage conversation, sufficiently remote to discourage undue familiarity, bore witness to the tact and discretion of the mistress of the house.

Fabien was conscious of some emotion. This was the first time that the young girl had accorded him anything that resembled a prearranged interview, and though she had not thus far shown herself hostilely disposed toward him that day, he thought he could read in her manner a reserve that did not appear to him to augur well.

"Monsieur Malvois," she said to him, having cast a preliminary glance in the direction of the card-table, "I should like to know what is your opinion of me."

It seemed almost like a direct invitation to him to launch out into a declaration in the most approved rhapsodical style; but Fabien was too wise to walk into the trap, if for such it were intended.

"I think, mademoiselle," said he, "that nothing would afford me greater pleasure than to

know in what esteem you hold my humble person."

"Is that your desire? I'll tell you. I think that you are very amiable; you have intelligence, and a great deal of learning. Those are things that I don't so very much care for myself, but most people attach importance to them. You dance well—not to perfection, but well enough. And, let's see—what more is there? I think that's all. Now it's your turn."

She looked at him triumphantly; he smiled on her with a beatific air.

"You, mademoiselle, have every grace of mind and person—and not a single defect," he answered.

"We are getting on finely!" Juliette disdainfully observed. "If we keep on in this way midnight will surprise us; the old folks will have finished their game, and we shan't have advanced a step further than we are now. Come, I'll put a more direct question to you: Did you ever know your mother?"

Fabien was surprised; it was the last question he would have expected her to ask him. Still, it was no more than natural that she should make inquiries concerning his family, if she had any thought of marrying him. But the memory thus suddenly evoked had set a cord vibrating, and when he answered it was in a graver tone.

"I was only ten years old when she died, but her memory still remains very distinct."

"Did you love her?"

"Yes, very dearly. Her loss, little as I was

at the time, was a terrible blow to me; it was my first acquaintance with sorrow."

Juliette's eyes sank, and she was silent; presently she resumed:

"Can you remember her?"

"As if she were still living. I do not think that a day ever passes over my head without my beholding her again in memory, as she used to appear to me when I went to give her my good-night kiss."

"Was she pretty?"

"To me she appeared very beautiful—as she was, if her portraits are to be relied on."

"And she," Juliette continued, "did she love you? She was kind and good to you, wasn't she?"

The young man hesitated. Was it fitting that this memory, which he cherished so tenderly in the deepest recesses of his being, should be made the topic of an idle evening's conversation? He looked at the pretty child whom for the last six months he had been regarding in the light of a possible wife. She sat waiting for his answer, with serious mien and grave look.

Suddenly a sensation of shame and self-reproach rose to his mind. True, for the last six months he had been doing his best to win her favor; but had he ever attempted to raise her and himself to a level somewhat higher than the ordinary commonplaces of their surroundings? They had danced together, and, as Juliette had said, in the interval between two waltzes, had now and then exchanged ideas on music, paint-

ing, literature—so far as a girl just out of school can have ideas on these subjects. But what did they really know of each other? Must it not be set down to her credit, as an instance of fearless candor, that she could question him thus on his inmost and most sacred feelings before consenting to share her life with him? That marriage of love that he had dreamed of, instigated thereto by Edmee, would it be worthy of the name should they begin their new life absolute strangers to each other, save for the evidence of their eyes, and such ideas as we form of those we love by dint of constantly dreaming of them? Like the honest, loyal man he was, he rested his eyes on Juliette, and saw that she was waiting patiently, in the belief that her question was important, and that he was doing right in reflecting before answering it.

“Yes, mademoiselle,” he slowly said, “my mother loved me very tenderly—as much as I loved her, and even more, perhaps; for a mother’s capacity for loving exceeds that of her little ones. We suffer ourselves to be loved when we are small.”

“And when we are older, too, sometimes,” said Juliette, with a glance at Mme. Fontenoy, where she sat in the bright circle of the lamp-light. “And so your life was a happy one, with madame your mother?”

“Perfectly happy. I was with her almost all my time, outside the hours devoted to my lessons. Whenever she went out she took me with her. I remember the charming rides we had

together, on summer afternoons, in the great landau. We would start out after dinner, while it was still bright day, and the sun's rays were casting over the woods and fields a mantle of haze that resembled golden dust. We would meet the husbandmen returning from their toil, their tools across their shoulder and their dinner-basket on their head. We would exchange greetings with them, and sometimes my mother would have the coachman stop the horses, that she might have a moment's converse with those humble folk whom she knew and who loved her. And then the sun sank lower and lower, sending forth level rays that skimmed the surface of the ground and made the shadows on the dusty road appear fantastically long. At last, the day-star would disappear. Then I would search the heavens for the first star; sometimes I was a long time looking for it, and when I had found it I would pull gently at mamma's sleeve to let her know. She always knew what that meant, would look upward to the zenith, and when she had descried it would answer: 'Yes, Fabien; I see it.' After that I would feel tired; I would pillow my head on her lap, and we would drive home in the gathering darkness, amid the pleasant odors of the dewy fields. Sometimes, when I was smaller, I used to fall asleep and on awaking find myself in my own little bedroom, whither my father had carried me. My mother would undress me while in that semi-conscious state, but I was always wide enough awake to feel her kiss upon my cheek."

Fabien had spoken in a low, rapt voice, without break or pause, as if he beheld the phantoms of his youthful memories rising before his vision. Juliette, motionless as a statue, listened to him gravely. When he ceased she was silent, and the young man felt that his words had produced a profound impression on her. After a moment she asked him, still with downcast eyes:

“And your father, is your memory of him equally distinct?”

“Oh, my father!” Fabien replied; “he and I were the best of friends. Imagine! when he died I was nineteen years old. We were comrades, and still I had all the respect for him that a boy should entertain toward his parent. But my respect was so tempered by a sentiment of confiding friendliness that I was hardly conscious of it; I simply regarded him as my best friend.”

“He was your best friend,” Juliette gravely said.

“You are right. We had delightful times traveling together. He was excellent company, always bright and cheerful, with a temperament that disposed him to look on the sunny side of life, so that no one ever retained his ill-humor long in his society. When I was young I was a little—how shall I express it? Well, a little of a prig, we’ll say; and about the time I was fifteen, being impressed with an exalted notion of my own desert, I had become very consequential and used to assume magisterial airs—”

“You?” asked Juliette, smiling to herself, for she had not yet raised her eyes.

“Even I, who have the honor of relating the fact to you. But I got over that pretty soon, I warrant you! My father took me with him to Switzerland, on a vacation jaunt, and pointed out to me my own absurdities in such a witty and good-natured way, in the people whom we met with—and we saw any quantity of ridiculous old fellows at the tables-d’hôte in the course of our six months’ trip—that I never afterward had the least inclination to revert to my former practices. And that was effected without scolding or sermonizing on his part—merely by a droll remark now and then, a careless word spoken at random, that served to remind me at evening that I had made a fool of myself that morning. Ah! what a friend I lost in him! The only thing that afforded me any comfort in my deprivation is the reflection that we were perfectly happy in each other, and that never, save in circumstances that lay beyond my control, was I cause to him of serious anxiety. There was only one thing that was a source of sorrow to me. My father could not bear to hear me mention my mother’s name after she was taken from us.”

“Why?” asked Juliette.

“At first I think it was to avoid wounding my sensibility; at a later period I imagine it was because he had loved her too tenderly to speak of her to any one; his heart had never healed. I often regretted it. I never insisted on introducing a subject that was painful to him. Still, it would have been a great comfort to me.”

Juliette sighed and slightly shivered, as if a burden were resting on her young shoulders.

“That being so,” she said, seriously, even a little sadly, “loving your mother as you did, you must consider it very strange of me that I neglect mine as I do.”

He made a gesture of denial, but she did not allow him to speak.

“It is true. I am seen everywhere, visiting, going from house to house and enjoying myself, and every one knows that I have an ailing mother, who does not leave her room. It cannot but give people an unfavorable opinion of me, and still I assure you that I do not deserve it.”

“Believe me, mademoiselle—”

“Yes, I know; you had never thought of the matter. Gentlemen don’t usually devote much reflection to the mothers of their young lady acquaintances; when they do think of them it is to consider the mother-in-law aspect of the question, and then the less they meditate the better. But when the mother-in-law question is not under consideration, and you see a young lady who doesn’t go with her mother, and doesn’t seem to trouble herself the least bit about her, it must produce a very bad impression. You must say to yourselves, ‘She is heartless.’ Now, monsieur, I don’t want you to think that I am heartless. I have a great deal of love for my poor mamma. If I am here instead of being with her, it is because I am acting in obedience to her desire. She said to me: ‘Go, and have a good time.’ I know that I have the appearance

of enjoying myself, monsieur; I am well aware that I appear so. But, oh! at heart I am oftentimes very, very sad. And I tell you this because it would be unfair that you should think ill of me on those grounds."

Juliette's lips were beginning to quiver. Strive as she might to control herself, her emotion was too strong for her will power, and Fabien dared not look at her. Perhaps his perturbation would have been less had it not been for that whist-table over against them.

"Mademoiselle," said he, "I have always entertained the highest opinion of you, and within the last few minutes that good opinion has grown immeasurably. I confess that the thought of madame your mother has not greatly occupied my mind. I knew that she was ailing and did not mingle in society, and it appeared to me quite natural that your aunt should have kept you with her, in order that you might have some of the pleasures suited to your age and station. I could discern that you were good, mademoiselle, under your apparent—"

"Apparent what?" asked Juliette, whose smile was gradually beginning to return.

"You disconcert me terribly. Suppose we say—no, not that. Light-heartedness—how will that do?"

"I am light-hearted, monsieur, really and truly I am; but that doesn't preclude the possibility of sentiment, as my nurse used to say when I was a little thing. And I love my mother notwithstanding, I assure you. In former sum-

mers I remained with her; we went to the seashore. And then her condition underwent a change; she became very ill. And now I am here, but it is at her desire; for I asked her to let me stay with her at the Clocher, although it is not a deliriously diverting place, the Clocher. There, monsieur, that's what I wanted to tell you."

She rose. Fabien would have liked to ask her a hundred questions, or, better still, perhaps, a single one that should have contained the essence of them all. But she was already stationed behind her uncle's chair, overlooking the cards that he held in his hand.

"Not that one, uncle; not that one? What in the world can you be thinking of? Haven't you the whole day to look at Aunt Edmee in that you need to be admiring her while playing whist?"

Fontenoy blushed, actually blushed, like a schoolboy caught red-handed, and played the card indicated by his niece, thereby provoking a general laugh at his expense.

"I don't know what I was thinking of," he said, apologetically; "it must have been this little girl who upset my calculations. Little girl, you are insupportable!"

Juliette laughed loud and merrily, throwing back her head like a bird in the act of singing. Fabien looked at her ecstatically; Forest's eyes were directed across the table on Edmee, who was charming in her slight embarrassment. A servant entered the room with a telegram. Fon-

tenoy took it and laid it down in front of him unopened.

"The messenger is waiting for answer," said the servant.

"Pardon me," said Gilbert to his friends, as he tore open the blue envelope.

"It is for you, my dear," said he, handing it to his wife, who read:

"Come at once with Juliette."

Terror and alarm were on Edmee's face. "My poor sister sends for us to come to her," she said. "She must be worse!"

"What do you propose to do?" asked Fontenoy.

They had all risen, leaving their cards strewn on the table.

"Start at once," exclaimed Juliette, who as yet had uttered no word. "Now, aunt; right away, I beseech you! Mamma says come at once!"

She was very pale, and her eyes, filled with an expression of mute, agonized appeal, seemed to have retreated deeper into her face, that was of the hue of ivory. Fabien was conscious of a great wave of tenderness and infinite compassion surging through his being. He would have wished to press her to his heart, and speak to her those words of comfort which, in our moments of great moral suffering, afford us a sensation of warmth and cheer. But that was a privilege to which he could lay no claim. He advanced a step, as if in response to her unuttered appeal. But Edmee spoke; he stopped.

“Yes, we will go,” she said, placing the poor child’s arm in hers. “But first we must make sure that we shall find a connecting train at Paris; otherwise we may as well wait until the morning.”

The time-table was brought. Juliette feverishly turned the leaves, and was unable to find what she wanted. Fontenoy gently took it from her hands, and conducted the search more methodically.

“Here it is,” said he. “You can start from here an hour from now, and travel express to Paris. At Paris you will find a way-train that will bring you to the Clocher at five o’clock in the morning. It is not very pleasant, but if you wait until the next train, you won’t reach there until one in the afternoon. Elect which you prefer.”

“Oh, aunt!” said Juliette, in a low voice, with an accent of entreaty that went to all their hearts, “I beseech you!”

Edmee kissed her and rang to have things made ready for their departure. Forest and Fabien came forward to take their leave.

“No; stay, won’t you, please?” said Juliette, in a coaxing tone; “stay and talk to me. I can’t bear to be alone; the minutes appear to me so long—and so short!”

“We will escort you to the station,” said Forest.

Two small valises were presently brought down, together with the rugs and wraps. Twenty minutes after the receipt of the telegram

which had disturbed the tranquillity of the peaceful household, they were ready for departure. Fontenoy presented himself in traveling costume.

"Are you going?" said Edmee, in surprise.

"Did you think I would let you travel unattended, and by night? I am going to Paris, to see you aboard the train, and if you desire it I will accompany you the entire distance."

"No, no," his wife replied, gratified at heart by his manifestation of thoughtfulness; "you need go no further than Paris. The Clocher is not a roomy house; we shall cause them enough inconvenience there as it is. And then, too, that abode of sickness is no fit dwelling-place for you."

"As you please," said he. "But let us be off."

By a tacit understanding, Forest took Fontenoy with him in his carriage, and left Fabien to accompany Edmee and Juliette. The night was cool, the moon was setting in the melancholy of her last quarter, when the light she dispenses is so dim and cheerless. The horses took a lively gait, the woods sped by to right and left with a wholesome odor of birch-bark. A shiver of dread passed through Fabien's frame. Was the dream of his heart, which that very evening had seemed almost within his grasp, about to take flight for those regions of inky blackness above, together with so many other vanished joys of youth whose regret haunts us in our riper years when they are lost to us forever?

Juliette said nothing. Muffled in her cloak, a shawl spread over her lap, she was thinking with

painful intensity of that neglected mother who had summoned her to her bedside, perhaps to render the last filial offices; and the days of her youth and girlhood passed before her in review like the changing hues of a kaleidoscope.

She had been a kind and loving mother in the past. She had always been kind, only she had become something of a misanthrope; she preferred a life of solitude. It was not Juliette's fault if her gayety, bright and happy as a young bird's, was uncongenial to the sick woman. But neither, on the other hand, was it the fault of the sick woman. Why was that dispatch so brief and unsatisfactory? Was she in such straits that her attendant had not dared to tell her relatives all the truth? What would they find on reaching their destination?

What! could that be the station? The carriage stopped. Fabien jumped down and gave his hand, first to Edmee, then to Juliette. She seemed to be unconscious of his attention. He conducted her to the platform, for the train was already in sight. As it rolled into the station she turned on him her pretty face, to which the night air had lent a heightened color; the eyes shone with a luster all the brighter for their tears.

"Monsieur Malvois," she said, in a gentle voice, "I am very glad that I had that conversation with you this evening about my poor mamma. You will not now believe that the intelligence of her illness was required to make me think of her."

“And for my part, mademoiselle, I thank you for it with all my heart,” he replied, giving her his hand.

The train passed them, and drew up alongside the platform with a discordant creaking of the brakes. The doors were thrown open, the passengers took their places, and it was off again. Forest and Fabien returned to where their carriage was awaiting them.

“Life has strange vicissitudes,” said Malvois. “Only an hour ago we were so tranquil—so happy, I might almost say; and now it seems as if a tempest had passed over our heads.”

“Life would not be life were matters otherwise, my young friend,” the old philosopher replied.

XVI.

FONTENOY, in accordance with his expressed intention, escorted his wife and niece to the Orleans station. The accommodation train, made up chiefly of third-class carriages, with its load of unwashed passengers, its sleepy guards, and general laxity of discipline, was totally unlike the smart expresses by which he was accustomed to travel. In this unfamiliar state of affairs, he placed the two women in a compartment and took measures to secure their privacy in it during their journey. Then the locomotive began to pant and wheeze, the train crawled slowly past him along the rails, and when at last he

found himself alone upon the platform it seemed to him as if they were bound for some distant land from which it was by no means certain that they would ever return.

A strange feeling, a compound of nostalgia and restlessness, took possession of him. He tried to shake it off, and hailed a cab to take him to his own abode. As it was too late to think of returning to La Tremblaye, there was nothing for him to do but seek the shelter of his own house, away at the other end of the city.

The great mansion appeared to him horribly lonely and gloomy. The concierge, aroused from his first sleep, was disinclined to let him in, and while he was lighting a candle to conduct his master up the stairs Fontenoy could hear him grumbling to his wife that "the least people could do when they came home at such an hour of the night was to give notice in advance."

Gilbert's bedroom smelled close and stuffy. It had that smell which is peculiar to rooms that have been for a while disused—an odor made up of stale perfumes, of clothing and curtains that would be the better for a good shaking; of things overlooked in the hurry of departure—a particularly depressing odor, whose property it is to evoke melancholy memories. He threw open the window and inhaled a deep draught of fresh air.

Down yonder, beneath the winking stars, lay La Beauce, toward which the train was slowly creeping onward across the slumbering fields. Why had Edmee forbidden him to accompany

them? It would have been infinitely better, and he would have been more easy.

Easy? But what reason had he for being uneasy? Do not people travel by rail every day without anything happening them? As for Edmee's distress at finding her sister dying—dead, perhaps—the presence of a husband would have been unavailing to alleviate it; on the other hand, it would have been a source of additional trouble and confusion. Edmee had acted sensibly in declining his offer.

He closed the window and turned to go to his bed, which was always kept made up in readiness to meet an emergency like the present. As he crossed the floor his glance lighted on the secretary from which his wife had extracted the drawer of letters.

"I am very glad that I thanked Edmee for what she did for me that day," thought Fontenoy. "I put it off too long. I wonder why I did not do it at once. She must have thought me ungrateful, and yet I am not ungrateful."

A twinge of conscience put an end to his soliloquy. Could he put his hand upon his heart and assure himself that he was not ungrateful? He had certainly proved himself to be so.

"She is deserving of better things," he continued, remorseful in his loneliness. "She behaved admirably. She must have suspected what the contents of those letters were, and the delicacy she displayed in deceiving me and making me believe she was ignorant was as rare as it was noble. I had no idea that she possessed

such strength of character, such command of self. It seems to me that in the past—”

Here Fontenoy lost himself in a maze of retrospective meditations. What Edmee had been in the past, in those recollections now suddenly summoned back to life after having been allowed to lie so long dormant, was an amiable and lively young creature, whose most conspicuous characteristics were perfect uprightness and incontestable goodness of heart; a slightly indolent understanding, a certain degree of vagueness in her ideas, together with a strong inclination to accept accomplished facts and make the best of everything. Such were the qualities that, touched by the golden rays of the honeymoon, had gone to make up the charming and refined home where, during the succeeding years, Fontenoy had enjoyed domestic peace undarkened by a cloud.

Suddenly he recalled to mind the conversation that they had had when, on the occasion of their conference relative to Juliette's marriage, Mme. Fontenoy had made that statement which so surprised her husband.

“I have not been happy,” she had said. And Gilbert's reflection at the time had been that if his wife should take it in her head to consider that she was not appreciated she would become a horrible nuisance.

And behold, his forebodings had been groundless; she had not manifested the slightest indication of becoming a nuisance. That startling statement, which he had dreaded to see followed

by open hostilities, had been succeeded by no warlike demonstration. Edmee had preserved the even tenor of her way, and continued to be, as she had always been, affectionately solicitous for his welfare, measured in speech, decent in action; while *he* had occasionally snubbed her, with that seasoning of ill-humor which, in many men, seems to be the imprescriptible prerogative of marital authority. She had not protested either by words or deeds. But, for some time past she had been growing prettier and prettier.

Fontenoy had extinguished his candle. In the bed that was strange to him for having been of late unused, that was one moment too hot and the next too cold, the fiend Insomnia had taken up his abode; and among the fantastic notions that an abnormal lucidity of thought and a preternaturally active memory were continually engendering, this consideration, which had never occurred to him before, rose to his mind: Might it not be that all those charms which, in those recent days, had made Edmee so attractive—her renascent beauty, her evenness of temper, the tolerant indulgence which she manifested toward himself—might it not be that all these things announced the dawn of a new era, the rise of a new star in the heart of her whom her husband had guarded so carelessly—in other words, might not Edmee be in love?

It is due to Fontenoy to state that, in this dubitative frame of mind, he did not admit the possibility of transgression; he had too genuine an esteem for his wife, and too exalted an opin-

ion of his own importance, to harbor degrading and injurious suspicions. Edmee, so far as he was aware, had never told a falsehood; lying is not an art that is acquired in a day, and her eyes, the eyes of an upright woman, had never been averted. Had never been averted? Had he not of late more than once seen them sink at his approach, while the pretty face was overspread with something very like a blush?

“Can she be in love with some one?” Fontenoy asked himself. The doubt that harassed his mind immediately suggested the second question: “With whom is she in love? Who occupies her thoughts? Who is there whom she manifests a pleasure in meeting?”

The husband’s imagination did not have to go far afield. There was but one man who occupied her thoughts; one person had been singled out by her to be graced with a favor beyond the ordinary, while at the same time she deferred acceding to the wishes of that same man. Edmee had desired that Juliette’s marriage should not be decided on precipitately. What could be more manifest? It was Fabien whom she loved.

“And it was I,” reflected Fontenoy, at three o’clock in the morning, as wide awake as a nest of little mice, “it was I who was such a donkey as to introduce him to the house!”

Greatly disconcerted by his discovery, and yet more by that last and most disagreeable reflection of his, he promised himself that next day he would go to work in earnest to fathom a matter that concerned him so nearly. With a candor

that disarmed criticism, however, he admitted to himself that he had deserved his fate.

"I should have kept my eyes open," he said. "The truth is, I neglected her too much!"

XVII.

It was about three o'clock when, on the following day, Fontenoy entered the Fremonts' grounds. Postponing the various affairs of business or pleasure that he had proposed to attend to while in Paris, he had returned by the morning train, pale and haggard after a sleepless night of care and torturing doubt.

The first person whom he set eyes on was Mme. Verseley, promenading under the lindens in company with D'Argillesse. Attired in a miraculous conception of a gown, a gown that seemed to protest, in the meanest of its frills and flounces, its unworthiness to drape so ravishing a form, the fair Undine appeared even more captivating than usual. But Fontenoy took no thought of Mme. Verseley, nor of M. d'Argillesse, either. He had not even eyes for the twin diamonds that glittered on the corsage of the one, or the pink that decorated the jacket of the other; it was for Fabien, Fabien only that he was looking. Since Edmee was at the Clocher, and common decency forbade the young man to go to meet her there—here he perceived that since the day before he had utterly forgotten his sister-in-law's existence

—it was to Fabien's countenance that he must look to learn the truth, disagreeable or comforting as the case might be. He had worked himself up to such a pitch that the idea of his finding any comfort there appeared to him absurd.

Fabien was there. He was playing tennis with surprising ardor; like a man whose object it was to deaden reflection, thought Fontenoy. Maguelonne returned him his ball in a manner worthy of so expert a player, and so eligible a bachelor. And who was that playing in Maguelonne's field? Why, who should it be but little Descrosses, who, if he excelled in leading the cotillion, made but an indifferent partner at tennis, owing to a very pronounced myopia, which he stoutly denied, but which led him into innumerable scrapes and blunders whenever he engaged in those sports that we call athletic.

And while the young people were thus hilariously pursuing their obstreperous revels, Fontenoy's soul was steeped in the horrific blackness of despondency and doubt. Mme. Fremont, informed by public rumor—or, in other words, by her cook, on her return from market—of the sudden departure of Edmee and her niece, came to Gilbert with condolences which, though trite and commonplace as a public inn, were, for all that, none the less sincere.

“Any news?” shouted Fabien, as he delivered the ball with a mighty effort of his biceps.

Fontenoy looked him directly in the face. The face of mortal man is deceitful and not to be relied on, as philosophers well know. Fabien's

attested the truth of the statement, for it displayed the placid enjoyment that is afforded by physical exercise used moderately and not carried to excess.

"I shall never learn anything in this way," said Gilbert to himself; "I must wait and see them together. Really, I think I am making a fool of myself! But then I have never been jealous—"

The reflection came to an abrupt end. Mme. Verseley passed him, leaning on D'Argillesse's arm, so near that the hem of her gown brushed his boot. Had he not been jealous of that woman? so jealous that he was made ill? Yes, but that jealousy had nothing in common with the demon that was making mince-meat of the heart of Edmee's husband at the present moment.

And suddenly a great truth was let in upon his mind: that a man may be jealous of a woman—furiously, insanely jealous, even to the point of suicide—but that when that woman is his wife the sentiment assumes a different nature, is infinitely more profound, more intense; that, in the first case, wounded self-love may make the victim writhe and shriek under the ignoble torture, but in the second the cords of honor vibrate in quite a different manner, a hundred times nobler and more elevated, and, consequently, a hundred times more painful.

When Fabien had an opportunity to leave the game, he came up to Fontenoy, racket in hand, and asked him some questions concerning the travelers. As he could not discriminate between

the two ladies, Gilbert was none the wiser for these questions. He answered them more briefly than he would have done twenty-four hours earlier, and Malvois, not wishing to appear importunate, returned to the field.

D'Argillesse, in turn, came forward to make inquiries. This time Fontenoy could not help noticing the pink in the gentleman's buttonhole, but it caused no resentful feeling.

"Come along," the double-faced friend said to him, "come and have a look at Millot's mare; she is here. The hurdles have been set up at the far end of the park. She is a sulky brute; you can never tell whether she is going to mind you, or break your neck. So far she has been tractable, however. I never saw a horse jump as she does! She is a bird!"

"Who is riding her?" asked Fontenoy.

"I am for the present. Dormant has her in his stable, you know; but I prefer to ride her here because she is less nervous when alone."

Fontenoy had followed D'Argillesse. Presently they came to a broad expanse of turf where a track had been laid out with obstacles of various kinds; the hedge, the water-jump, the earthen wall—all were there, thanks to the liberality of kind-hearted M. Fremont, who had not hesitated to lay waste his pretty lawn to procure an additional pleasure for his guests.

Coralie—for such was the mare's euphonious name—was a showy thoroughbred. Under her thin skin the eye could trace the network of veins, which, at the faintest suspicion of alarm,

distended and stood out in knots and bunches. The head was small and well-shaped, with great breadth of forehead, but the eye had not that kindly, frank expression that is usually met with in animals of her race; the stealthy look reminded one of certain human beings to whom we generally give as wide a berth as possible. But, notwithstanding that, the general appearance of the creature, her beauteous chestnut coat, over which the light played in rippling waves with every movement of her skin beneath, her clean-cut legs, fine and supple as springs of steel, announced that she was no ordinary beast.

At sight of a stranger, she laid back her ears and sniffed the air suspiciously. Fontenoy went toward her, extending his open hand.

"Don't touch her, sir," said the groom, who was holding her by the halter. "She shies for just nothing at all; she might hurt you."

But Fontenoy knew what he was about. By using soothing words he succeeded in getting up alongside Coralie, and again and again patted her on the neck. She suffered his caresses, although her veins were swollen nearly to the bursting point. Gilbert, when satisfied, stepped back a little way.

"And now look out; I'm going to mount her," said D'Argillesse. "She has no great love for me, I think, but I don't mind that. I am not afraid of men, and it's not likely that I'm going to be scared by a horse."

Coralie shifted her ground, avoiding the approaches of her rider with great dexterity. He

tried to take her off her guard, but to no purpose; she appeared to have an instinctive perception of his presence even when she could not see him. But he was no less cunning than she. With feline precautions he slipped up to her, and was on her back before she knew it.

The mare reared and plunged, kicking out furiously to right and left, but only had her labor for her pains. D'Argillesse was a consummate horseman, and thwarted all her attempts to throw him. Then, as if accepting the inevitable, champing the bit, and casting sidelong glances at Fontenoy and the groom, she came down to her gait.

"If I were in your place, I shouldn't feel easy," said Gilbert; "that brute has an ugly look out of her eyes."

The words had hardly passed his lips when Coralie made an attempt to throw her ride over her head. Failing in that, she immediately reversed proceedings and reared with such violence that her hind legs gave way under her and she came near falling. The two witnesses to the performance darted forward and caught her by the bit. She gave in, and came down on her forefeet, her head down, looking around her wickedly, trembling from head to tail and drenched with sweat.

"If I were you I would give it up," Fontenoy reiterated.

"Not I!" replied D'Argillesse, with an undaunted air.

His first care was to administer to Coralie

a well-deserved correction. She was mad with rage, and behaved as if possessed with a demon, but calmed down somewhat as soon as she was convinced of the futility of her efforts to rid herself of her tormentor; her chest and neck were flecked with great flakes of froth, but she was comparatively tranquil, except that she was obstinate in refusing to pursue a straightforward course.

"Is that her usual gait?" Fontenoy asked, during a momentary pause in the performance. "You'll excuse me for saying so, but it gives her a little the appearance of a crab."

"I had her out a few days ago, and we traveled five miles in that style," D'Argillesse replied. "As you may imagine, it took us quite a while to cover the distance, but coming back she was gentle as a lamb."

Perhaps Coralie understood him, and resented the allusion; at all events she commenced her old tricks again, and thereby secured for herself a second chastisement. The lesson, this time, seemed to be effectual, for she gave up the contest; thoroughly subdued, she went at the obstacles and took them with great docility, jumping as long as she was required to do so without the persuasion of the whip.

When he had had enough of the exercise, D'Argillesse walked the mare up to where Gilbert was standing, watching horse and rider with unbounded admiration.

"You see that I made her mind, at last!" he said.

"I wouldn't trust her," Fontenoy replied, while his friend was dismounting; "such a foxy brute is bound to play her rider some nasty trick in the end."

"It is immaterial to me what she does, so long as I am not the sufferer by her temper," replied D'Argillesse, lighting a cigar; "her owner can attend to that. I shall send her back to him at the end of the week. Such an animal is only fit for the hurdles; she is no good for pleasure riding. She will probably be the death of a jockey or two before she kills herself. But that's their lookout."

"Couldn't you ride her more safely in company?" Fontenoy asked. "You were talking of getting up a party, weren't you?"

"She is generally civil enough in company, when she and the other horses are on good terms. We might try it."

As they were returning to the tennis ground they met Mme. Verseley, accompanied by little Descrosses, who was carrying on an outrageous flirtation with the lady, half in jest, half in earnest; in either case, the spectacle he afforded was a sufficiently diverting one.

"Well!" said she, planting herself in front of the two gentlemen in the middle of the path, "are you going to ride that mare, or are you not? We should like to have an opportunity to see what is going on! You come and secrete yourself here in the fastnesses of the park, where we are not allowed to penetrate. Who knows what nefarious practices you are pursuing? And

here is M. Descrosses aching with the desire to try his hand."

"Oh! so far as I am concerned, madame," the young man modestly replied, "I ride nothing bigger than a Newfoundland dog, and that only of a Sunday."

D'Argillesse smiled disdainfully. He was not afraid of that rival.

XVIII.

It was in the early light of a morning unusually cool for the time of year that the train which carried Edmee and her niece stopped at the shabby little station, open to all the winds that blew. The sun had not yet risen, and nature wore that cheerless aspect that she presents just previous to his appearance. Juliette, whose slumbers during the night had been confined to a few brief naps, was shivering in the raw air. Her aunt tenderly wrapped a small shawl about her, and leaving their slender baggage at the station, they directed their steps toward the Clocher, which was distant only a scant half mile.

The house was a tall, ugly and gloomy structure. The single cypress, object of Juliette's sarcasm, reared its slender form upon the grayish atmosphere like a huge wax candle that had been left unlighted and that some jovial cobbler had amused himself by enduing with a coat of blacking. Quickening their steps, the two wo-

men came to the gate and rang. While waiting the young girl raised her anxious eyes to a window that she knew well.

"Oh, aunt, just look!" said she, grasping the other's arm, "there is a light in mamma's room!"

She was so pale that, had it not been for the feverish light in her eyes, she would have been like a corpse. Mme. Fontenoy was thinking what she could say to comfort her, when the house door opened to give passage to a servant-girl carrying a large bunch of keys; and at the same moment the shutters of the room above were thrown back by an ungentle hand. They crashed against the wall with a report that elicited a response from all the poultry in the barnyard.

"Ah!" Juliette softly exclaimed, with a sigh of relief that went to the heart of her fond aunt.

"Madame is better," the girl volunteered, as she opened the gate for them; "madame will be rejoiced to see you, ladies. She has had a fairly good night, but we thought yesterday that we were surely going to lose her. Will you please walk upstairs, ladies."

Juliette was already half way up the stairs; at the threshold she stopped, unable to go further. Her fears had overtaxed her strength, and now the reaction manifested itself by a sensation of collapse. Edmee came up and gently pushed her before her into the room, the door of which was open.

Mme. Chassagny was reposing on a low and extremely plain bed, her head supported by pil-

lows; her face was yellow as old parchment, and she was thin as a person could well be and live. But there was great vitality in her eyes, and they were animated by a strangely intense expression. Juliette ran to the bedside and threw her arms about her, murmuring: "Mamma! mamma!"

"I am pretty well to-day," said the sick woman, in a voice so faint that it seemed to come from some distant region. "The worst is past, my dear daughter, and I think that I shall go on improving. But yesterday I thought that my minutes were numbered. I was distressed at the thought of departing without a last embrace from you."

"Mamma! mamma!" repeated Juliette, unconsciously pressing Mme. Chassagny's hand until it became cold as ice. She did not cry, knowing how harmful emotion of any kind would be to the enfeebled sufferer, but the stress that she imposed on herself in holding back her tears caused her slight form to tremble like a leaf.

"Well, my dear Cecile," Edmee gently said, "we are very glad we came, since we have the pleasure of seeing you getting on so well. You are too lonely here; you live too much by yourself. We must try to put a stop to that. In the meantime, don't you think it would be well to send your little girl off to bed? She is greatly in need of sleep."

Juliette demurred. She was not the least bit sleepy; she would rather stay with her mother. But Mme. Fontenoy was inflexible, and the young girl finally yielded.

Edmee was not conscious of fatigue; she still had a reserve of the nervous energy that had sustained her during the night, and having a host of questions to ask and answer, the two sisters conversed together for a long time, with occasional pauses to husband the sick woman's strength. Gradually, by bits and snatches, Mme. Fontenoy acquired a knowledge of the occurrences of the past six weeks.

Mme. Chassagny, feeling that the illness with which she was threatened would be serious, had made haste to send away her daughter, partly that the girl might be spared the spectacle of her sufferings, still more, perhaps, from that sentiment which induces in strong and self-reliant natures the imperious desire for solitude when they feel that physical pain is imminent. Aware that her condition was becoming worse from day to day, she obstinately refused to speak of it, and also enjoined on her household not to mention it to any one except the doctor. And then a crisis had ensued, so violent and so long-protracted that the patient was deprived of all her remaining strength, and the thought that she was to die without beholding her child again seemed to her more than she could endure; then it was that she had sent the telegram, in the faint hope that it might not be too late.

"You can form no idea," she said to her sister, "of what my agony was between the moment when I dispatched it and that when the answer came, last night at one o'clock. I reproached myself bitterly for having delayed so long, and

thus deprived myself of the chance of seeing you once more. When your answer reached me it acted like a cordial; my pains left me, I fell into a sound sleep, and since my wakening I have not been conscious of suffering."

Great caution had still to be observed, however. Edmee thoughtfully declared that she had need of rest, and retired to her room in the midst of a blaze of light with which the fierce August sun inundated the whole house.

When she returned to her sister, Juliette was also there. Seated on a low chair, silent and motionless, a well-behaved child, she watched her mother with eyes full of a tender delight that no one had ever witnessed there before. It seemed as if she had then for the first time discovered in her attractions hitherto unnoticed. She scrutinized the lean, yellow face, and appeared to read on it characters which disclosed to her a multitude of strange and unknown things.

At sight of her aunt she gave a little friendly nod and remained seated, like a person who is quite comfortably situated, and does not care by moving to disturb the serenity of his repose. In this manner the day passed slowly away, with no other incident than the visit of the doctor, who declared himself satisfied with his patient's condition. The sun, as Juliette had one day playfully remarked, peeped in turn into all the rooms of the house, being deterred therefrom by no intervening obstacles; he illuminated one front at evening as he had shone on the other in

the morning, and finally declined on the level horizon in a vaporous haze of gold and crimson.

Alone in the garden, where a few sickly currant and gooseberry-bushes indicated the course of the straggling, grass-grown paths, Juliette contemplated the monotonous landscape, over which the influence of the hour cast for a brief moment an evanescent glamour; the light, still lingering in the zenith, descended with a mellow radiance, imparting strange forms to familiar objects, the earth exhaled a wholesome odor, the wide plain stretched away far as the eye could reach, dotted here and there with indistinct spots of deeper darkness, a house, a church, a clump of woods. Gradually the illuminated circle closed in around the place where the young girl stood, while the grayish, vaporous horizon seemed to recede further and further into the shadowy distance, until it was like some vast, boundless ocean. She looked at the spectacle with an impression of having never seen it before, and perhaps she had not, with her inner vision.

"It is horribly depressing," she said to herself, "and yet it is fine—fine as a beautiful woman in her shroud!"

She shivered slightly, and slowly retraced her steps toward the house.

During the last twenty-four hours new lights had dawned on Juliette. Fabien's words had produced a profound impression on her. She had never suspected the possibility of such intense filial affection existing in a man grown,

especially for a mother who had been so long dead. The young girls whom she knew loved their mammas after a fashion; the young men loved nothing at all—at least, they said they didn't. And here was Fabien opening for her a window of his soul that afforded her glimpses of a garden full of fruits and flowers that were unknown to her.

Until the present time she had said to herself: "Must I marry this gentleman? Is he worthy, does he deserve that I should make him the gift of my precious little person?"

Now she asked herself: "What must he think of me? He knows that I am here by this time. Perhaps he thinks that I am making myself serviceable, and yet my services amount to nothing—less than nothing. I have not known how to take the place that was mine of right. They are hirelings, servants, who nurse my mother; I am fit for nothing but to look at her and smile when she looks at me. What does that avail?"

A profound melancholy took possession of Juliette. She felt that tears would be a relief and comfort. The fields were now gray and silent, wrapped in a repose that was instinct with solemnity. The eye refused to penetrate that waste of dull neutral shadows where form had ceased to exist, and which yet did not excite the idea of voidness. The silence and immensity were calculated to inspire thoughts of a solemn nature. Juliette let her arms fall to her side in discouragement.

"I know nothing of life," she said to herself.

“The life of others is a mystery to me. Hid within the bosom of the shadows that surround me are hundreds, thousands of men and women who have their joys and sorrows. I cannot see them, I do not know them; and as little as I know of them, it is as much as the little that I know of my own mother! I am a spoiled child—yes, a spoiled child. And if she had died to-night before we reached here?”

A great sob shook the slight form that was looking out on the dim horizon, now so close at hand.

“If she had died, I should never, never have forgiven myself. There is no forgiving one’s self for a calamity that is of one’s own causing—and the blame would have been all mine. I ought never to have left her.”

“Juliette,” called Mme. Fontenoy, “where are you, out there in the darkness?”

“Here I am,” she answered, hastily wiping away her tears.

Mme. Chassagny fell asleep early in the evening. Succeeding her recent sufferings, this recuperative slumber was a veritable benediction to her. Edmee and her niece, each in her own chamber, also wooed the drowsy god. To Mme. Fontenoy he was propitious, but to Juliette coy, who long remained awake, revolving grave thoughts within her mind.

She had been wanting in filial duty. That was not an unpardonable fault, so long as it was the result of ignorance; but now that excuse had ceased to be available. She would not again leave her mother. Aunt Edmee should return

alone to La Tremblaye's pleasant glades, where the poplars whispered to one another all the day and night, where the pretty brook ran chattering over its bed of weeds. She would remain at the Clocher, with the pigeon-house as her defense against the rays of the scorching sun, in the midst of the great lonely plain, stripped of its harvests. Aunt Edmee might go back to the land of mirth and jollity, to the croquet, the tennis and the little dances of the Fremonts; she, Juliette, would devote her days to reading to her convalescent mother, and would set to work to embroider a great lambrequin for that hideous chimney-piece in the spare bedroom.

"Oh, that horrid chimney!" she groaned, "if it only wouldn't smoke! I wonder if it smokes as bad as ever? Perhaps mamma will have a cowl put on it—a sheet-iron cowl; that answers very well, sometimes—not always."

It was doubtless not a very attractive prospect, that of spending her summer at the Clocher. But it was not that which made Juliette so despondent. What are two or three months? Underlying her melancholy—for she had considered in all its bearings the sacrifice which she was imposing on herself—was something else, something that she hesitated to acknowledge even to herself. If she remained at the Clocher, she would not see Fabien Malvois until her return to Paris; and Heaven alone could tell when that would be!

"As if I cared for that!" she said to herself, with a fine assumption of indifference.

But Juliette was frank with herself. She might subject herself to self-torment, but she would not stoop to self-deceit. And she made the mental admission that croquet, lawn tennis, Maguelonne and La Tremblaye were of very small account compared with the reflection that she was to be debarred for a long time from seeing Fabien Malvois, who only twenty-four hours before, almost to the minute, had been talking to her of his mother with such repressed emotion.

“Well,” she said to herself, “if I feel so bad over it, I suppose it must be because I am in love with him. Yes, certainly, I love him! Isn’t it too bad, just at the moment when I am not going to see him any more! And if he should cease to care for me during the time while I’m away! That Maguelonne is a terribly enterprising girl. Suppose she should set her cap for him? She’s terribly enterprising, that’s true enough; but then, M. Fabien appears to be a pretty wide-awake sort of young man—a little precipitate, at times. Still, people don’t marry precipitately. Who knows? Perhaps he’ll wait until we’re back at Paris before making up his mind? Come, Juliette, my girl, why can’t you be honest? You know very well that he loves you, too—”

Juliette’s ideas were beginning to be somewhat foggy. She tried to recapitulate her conclusions: Aunt Edmee was to go home alone; at the beginning of winter she would—

At this juncture Juliette’s consciousness deserted her.

XIX.

THE following day Edmee wrote a longish letter to her husband, whose anxiety she had already relieved by a telegram. She gave excellent tidings of Mme. Chassagny, although she could not specify the precise day when she would be able to leave for home; added various directions for the government of the household at La Tremblaye, and concluded with these words:

“You may say to M. Malvois that our journey is far from being detrimental to his interests.”

Fontenoy puzzled his wits for a long time to get at the true inwardness of this sentence. Many small details of no importance, considered separately, were grouped together in his memory: a certain hand-kissing one day when he had come in upon his wife and Fabien alone together; smiles, looks of pleasure when they met, and so forth.

Still, as Fontenoy was not a blockhead, he finally became convinced that the words could have no significance that concerned him, personally; for there was no reason why Edmee should not write to the young man direct if she had anything to say to him.

At this point the demon of jealousy was near undoing the good work that reason had commenced. A woman of prudence does not write; she makes others the bearers of her messages.

It was now Labiche, instead of Octave Feuill-

let who suddenly invaded Fontenoy's memory. No method that has been, is, or ever will be employed by womankind to conduct a secret correspondence has escaped the observation of the great philosopher of La Beauce, and he has set them all forth for the edification of an admiring world. "Célèmare le Bien-Aimé" is an authority of its kind, to say nothing of the remainder of his ten volumes of plays.

Gilbert blushed for himself, and laughed, with a faint laugh of shame and vexation. Really, he must be beginning to have softening of the brain to entertain such notions! What resemblance could a sane man discover between Mme. Fontenoy and one of Labiche's heroines? He would dismiss the subject from his thoughts. To make his cure effectual, he went to pay a visit to Comte Forest. He said to himself that he would probably find Fabien there, and the sight of the loyal young man would remove the last of his doubts.

Between those two, one a life-long friend, the other a friend of more recent date, but so frank, so like himself in all respects; under those candid looks that met his own so fearlessly, Fontenoy felt a decided revival of confidence. Masculine friendship, in its strength and honest simplicity, is one of the best comforters that a soul in distress can have. Feminine tenderness is a precious consolation in sorrow and affliction, but when the mind is racked with uncertainty and doubt, the affection borne each other by men of feeling is a surer reliance. Forest and Fabien,

each in his own degree, felt that Fontenoy was no longer the happy and tranquil man he had been, and they both, by a tacit accord, set to work with soothing generalities to bind up the secret wound that he would not expose to them.

After two hours of a conversation, in which nothing was said that Gilbert could apply directly to himself, but which left him with renewed and reinvigorated faith in the honor of men, and the virtue of good women, he made up his mind to communicate to Malvois the words of Edmee's letter that had so troubled him.

The thankful look he received in return was the surest evidence he could have of his young relative's sentiments; it was the look of a lover who has nothing to conceal.

"I was beginning to hope," said Fabien. "And the bad news that broke up our little gathering the other evening was doubly inopportune; for, unless I deceive myself, Mdlle. Juliette was on the point of giving me her entire confidence. When you next write to Mme. Fontenoy, my dear cousin, will you oblige me by telling her how profoundly grateful I am for her kindness?"

It seemed to Gilbert as if a mountain had been suddenly lifted from his shoulders, and he saw that that mountain, which had weighed on him so heavily, was in reality nothing but a nebulous cloud, the product of his deviated imagination. Life all at once appeared to him brighter, broader, and longer, also. Behind the folds of that bugbear of a cloud new horizons appeared

whose mysteries he dared not as yet attempt to penetrate. But why, then, had he suffered so? Why had he teased and tormented himself thus? For a chimera? a raw head and bloody bones? Poor humanity!

It is a noteworthy fact that when one of our number has been guilty of some particularly foolish act, it affords him great pleasure and relief to bewail the faults and mistakes of humanity at large.

"How are you getting on at La Tremblaye, now that you are leading a bachelor life there?" asked Forest.

"I am bored to death," Fontenoy candidly replied. "The house is too big for one person. Juliette manages to fill it pretty well with her life and gayety, and I miss her, I can assure you."

"We know that," said Forest, with a laugh. "But she was not there in June and July, and you told me yourself that you were not bored an instant."

"Yes, but my wife was there!" Gilbert quickly answered, who surprised himself by a reply so unexpected.

"Is this the first time that you ever lived alone in your own house?" Forest rather maliciously continued.

"I—I believe it is," replied Fontenoy, more and more astonished by the discoveries he had made in relation to himself within the last few minutes. "I have frequently been away from home, but I don't think that it ever happened

me to be left alone in my own house, either at Paris or elsewhere."

"Mme. Fontenoy maintained the sacred fire on the altar of the domestic deities," said the philosopher with a pleasant smile. "Well, my good friend, now is the time for you to reciprocate her kindness. I hope you are a tolerably good house-keeper?"

"Faith, no! I don't know the first thing about it," Fontenoy modestly confessed.

He returned to his lonely abode at evening, after dinner, with a mind full of confused speculations.

The next morning, after a solitary breakfast, he proceeded to take a stroll through his big house, where everything was as neat and in the same excellent order as the week before, and was vexed to find it so large.

"It is a great deal too big for us," he reflected. "I don't know what we could have been thinking of when we bought this huge barrack. There's room enough to lodge a regiment, and for us two to live here alone—"

It suddenly occurred to him that the huge barrack had not seemed too large for their requirements while Mme. Fontenoy was there.

"Let one depart, and the whole world is vacant!"

his memory repeated to him. He smiled, like one who appreciated the value of poetry applied to the sentiments of one no longer young.

In the meantime, it was an indisputable fact that La Tremblaye was lonely, fearfully lonely.

Having fulfilled his duty as housekeeper, by giving the servants a general blowing up for imaginary delinquencies, he gave orders to saddle his horse, and started forth on a round of visits to those of his neighbors with whom he was on familiar terms. And, under the shadows of the trees, which the finger of September had already begun to touch with golden tints, like Racine's hero in the desert of the East, he aired his discontent.

XX.

AT the expiration of a week Mme. Chassagny, whose health was quite restored, and was even better than it had been for a long time before, urged her sister to return to La Tremblaye. Edmee did not need to be asked twice. In addition to the fact that the Clocher was anything but an agreeable residence, her domestic instinct told her that her own home would be the better for her presence, and, moreover, she asked herself with tender solicitude how Gilbert was faring in his deserted state.

For some reason or other Mme. Verseley's enterprises were less an object of anxiety to her than in the past. But the vision of Fontenoy, stalking disconsolately about his great empty mill, presented itself as vividly to her mind as if she had beheld him with her own bodily optics, in the act of accomplishing his melancholy pilgrimages from room to room.

“Very well,” she said to her sister, “as you don’t need me any longer I will go. But you are to come to us within a week; you promised me you would.”

“I don’t know,” began the self-constituted prisoner.

“Then I shall remain,” said Edmee, although it cost her a great effort to speak the words.

The discussion was protracted. Mme. Fontenoy, in support of her position, adduced the argument that it was a mother’s duty to see with her own eyes the man who might possibly become her son-in-law.

Mme. Chassagny, constantly haunted by the notion that her end was near at hand, had not thus far considered it necessary to inflict this task upon herself; what good would it do to look on the face and listen to the words of one whom she was soon to see no more forever? It would only be a waste of time, and perhaps the cause of unavailing regret. Fontenoy and his wife esteemed the young man worthy to be Juliette’s husband, therefore he must be so, for she had the most implicit confidence in their united judgment.

Seeing that she was not dead after a treatment which she had submitted to unwillingly, in a spirit of resignation and with the assurance that it would have a fatal termination, it occurred to Mme. Chassagny that not only her sister might be right, but that if she was to continue to live she would subject herself to deserved censure by thus neglecting so essential a portion of her mar-

ital duties. After a long wrangle, to which she was incited by her natural obstinacy, as well as by an invincible shyness of temperament, Juliette's mother finally yielded, and promised a visit of a week's duration, to be made as soon as she was in fit condition to travel.

"And take Juliette with you," said she, when everything was arranged.

"Take me? Not much!" exclaimed the young girl, who had been a silent listener to the conversation, a circumstance that caused Mme. Fontenoy no little astonishment. "I am not going to leave mamma."

"What's that?" cried Mme. Chassagny; "you are going to remain with me?"

Juliette wagged her little chin affirmatively—so energetically that the two sisters looked at her in alarm.

"And what about your marriage?" asked her mother, who could hardly trust her senses.

"That will take place whenever it pleases Heaven and you, mamma. But, marriage or no marriage, I have made a vow never to leave you again!"

Mme. Chassagny directed an interrogative glance at Edmee, but that lady was no wiser than her sister.

"You see, mamma," Juliette continued, "until now I've been a horrid, selfish thing; but there's going to be an end of that! To think how many times I have come home at three, four and five o'clock in the morning! I knew very well that you wouldn't get a wink of sleep until you

heard me come in; and yet I stayed out, dancing and enjoying myself! It makes me feel ashamed when I think of it, and I would like to give myself a good pounding. But it is also no more than right to say that it was mainly the effect of thoughtlessness, though I'm afraid I didn't try very hard to think. And I don't want that you should consider me a perfect monster, however much I may resemble one."

Mme. Chassagny, wonderful to relate, broke out in a fit of prolonged laughter. It was a thing that occurred so seldom with her, and had not happened in so long a time, that her daughter looked at her in stupefaction.

"That's right, mamma, make fun of me, if you will," she went on, with increased warmth, as soon as she had a little recovered from her surprise.

"It was so droll, the idea that any one should take you for a monster," replied her mother, still under the influence of her inextinguishable merriment.

"Yes, a monster! And if any one in this world is entitled to the credit of discovering that I am not so black a monster as I seem, that person is—"

She stopped short and dropped her eyes, apparently determined to say no more.

"Is M. Malvois?" Edmee gently suggested.

The little chin went up twice and down twice, with great emphasis.

"If he had the ingenuity to make such an important discovery he is deserving of a reward,"

said Mme. Chassagny. "I would advise you not to make him wait too long."

"He'll wait!" Juliette rejoined. "If he were to lose heart for such a little thing, he wouldn't be worth the trouble."

"The trouble of what?" insisted Mme. Chassagny, who was a great stickler for precision of language.

"The trouble of—of marrying him, my dear mother."

"But, Juliette," Mme. Fontenoy laughingly said, "if M. Malvois won't wait, where will your marriage be?"

The young girl burst into tears. It was so unlooked-for a proceeding on her part that her aunt was thunderstruck. She put her arms around her, and would have consoled her, but Juliette gently released herself.

"Don't tease me, aunt," she said, between her sobs; "please don't tease me! If you knew how hard I am trying to do my duty—"

She saw the lameness of her defense, and ran away and locked herself in her room. Mme. Fontenoy was greatly alarmed.

"I don't think I have ever seen her cry since she was twelve years old," she said to her sister.

"Nor I," replied Mme. Chassagny. "But it's not a bad sign, the way I look at it."

When Juliette made her appearance again, she was all smiles and blushes, with a shy grace and pretty caressing ways that made her even more than usually bewitching. She had the air of one seeking forgiveness for something she

had done, although her girlish face was bright with the pleasure of a generous sacrifice.

When the subject of her departure was again broached, she met it with a very decided negative.

“If you insist,” said she, “I shall think, in the first place, that Aunt Edmee wants to disoblige me, and that is not the least bit like her; and next, that mamma doesn’t love me any longer, and wants to get rid of me.”

Mme. Chassagny said nothing, but her eyes were perceptibly moist under their lowered lids.

“Then that’s settled, and I’m to stay,” Juliette continued. “And now,” she added, curling herself up like a kitten on the sofa beside her mother, “if mamma doesn’t wish—well, if she doesn’t wish to have all sorts of dreadful things happen, darling mamma will start with me for La Tremblaye, let’s see—Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday”—reckoning on her fingers—“on Thursday next, just a week from to-day.”

This time the three women laughed in concert, and Mme. Chassagny did not say no. The light that shone in her black eyes, handsome still, though showing the traces of suffering and illness, betrayed a happiness that they had not known for many a year.

“Then all that remains for me to do is to pack my trunk,” said Edmee. “I shall write to my husband that I start to-morrow. I will stop over one night at Paris; it will afford me a chance to see my dressmaker—the dressmaker, doesn’t that consideration tempt you, Juliette? I will have

her make you a nice little gown, if you will go with me. You won't? You shall have it anyway, only you'll have to depend on me for the selection. If it doesn't suit you it will be nobody's fault but your own."

XXI.

GILBERT was walking on the bank of the Nonnette, more at peace with himself than he had been in a long time. This happy frame of mind he attributed to the news, received by him that morning, of Edmee's departure for Paris. Her return would restore a little order and harmony to a household somewhat demoralized by the mistress's absence.

A fine mist, harbinger of autumn, had cast a few alder and poplar leaves on the much-trodden path, from which D'Argillesse no longer made any pretense of fishing for minnows.

Really, that man D'Argillesse, the more one came to know of him, the less he fulfilled the promise of his early acquaintance. He was cold, hard and cynical, even in intimate conversation.

Cynicism in the conversation of a man of the world is not generally repugnant to another man of the same category. But if one sets up for a cynic, the least he can do is to maintain the attitude. This was what D'Argillesse failed to do; he had as many attitudes as he met persons to converse with. Fontenoy, who was always consistent in word and deed, had no great liking for

this perfect adaptability; he preferred to be sulky when he felt like it, and his friends preferred to have him so.

Was it the truth that D'Argillesse's cynicism, instead of being assumed, or, at the utmost, intentionally exaggerated, as was the case with the majority of his contemporaries, was genuine and formed the foundation of the man's character? If that were so, then his virtues were all a pretense and a sham? The question was important, and called for serious investigation.

Gilbert had come to the end of the path. The road lay before him, skirting the Fremonts' property, and from there proceeding to Chantilly. He determined to push on that far to see what information he could pick up concerning a horse that had been offered him, and that he was thinking of buying.

The wall inclosing the park was low. On the other side was an alley of horse-chestnut trees, which the approach of autumn had stripped of their foliage. Their sturdy but almost leafless branches no longer yielded shade, and afforded no obstacle to sounds.

Walking leisurely in the pale sunlight, beneath a sky flecked with thin, white, fleecy clouds resembling cotton-wool, Gilbert heard the sound of a familiar voice holding forth under the trees. The air was so still, the silence so unbroken, that he could distinguish the dull sound produced by the carroming of one horse-chestnut against another, the cue being the tip of a cane or umbrella in the hand of an irate owner.

“You say what you please,” declared Mme. Verseley’s angry voice; “and you do what you like.”

“Isn’t that what we all do?” D’Argillesse nonchalantly rejoined.

Fontenoy halted. He undeniably had a very strong desire to learn what might be the nature of the reflections that those two persons were exchanging; but how far was he justified, as a man of honor, in listening to their conversation?

“You do what you like,” continued the lady. “Come, will you have the face to tell me that you have not been making up to that poor simpleton, Mme. Fontenoy?”

Fontenoy felt that further scruples would be misplaced. The promenaders beyond the wall were pursuing the same direction as he. The thick dust deadened the sound of his footsteps; and, moreover, they did not dream that they could be overheard. Gilbert unhesitatingly continued his progress.

“Do you believe that?” asked D’Argillesse, in a tone of innocent wonder.

Another chestnut, impelled by the irate umbrella, was heard to rebound from a stone bench.

“Do I believe it! There is not a soul, except her husband, who has not noticed it. Even Juliette, who is beginning to meddle in the business—as you might have seen the other evening. I tell you plainly that I don’t like it.”

“Are you jealous of Mme. Fontenoy?” asked D’Argillesse.

Fontenoy, who was acquainted with his tricks

of manner, divined that he was looking at Mme. Verseley out of the corner of his eye with an irony which, though essentially cruel, possessed a certain attraction of its own.

"I, jealous? I would have you understand that I am jealous of no one," the invisible lady scornfully replied; "but I like to have things open and above-board. You allowed me to believe, and you even told me in so many words, that it was for my sake that you came down here, and now it appears that she is mixed up in the affair. Is it on my account or on hers that you are here? That's what I want to know."

"On account of both!" D'Argillesse replied, with a low laugh, the reverse of tender.

The wall ended at that point with an iron gate whose bars afforded a view of the road. Either from caution or from curiosity D'Argillesse cast a glance that way and beheld Fontenoy, pursuing his way with an unaltered gait.

"He heard us," he briefly said to his companion.

But he was quick-witted in emergencies; impudent, some would have said. Raising his hat, he said aloud: "Ah, there!—good-day, Fontenoy."

He who was thus addressed turned his head and bowed slightly, but manifested no intention of stopping.

"There was a touch of the hat that I'll bet it went against his grain to make," D'Argillesse tranquilly observed, "and it wouldn't surprise me if it resulted in a touch of swords. I have

told you before this, madame, that a room is the only safe place to talk of one's affairs in, and even then it is better to make sure that the walls are thick."

They parted without further exchange of words, while Gilbert pursued his way to Chantilly.

His soul was seething with indignant rage. Several times, although the physical part of him continued to move onward, the mental retraced its steps to lash the false friend with one of those taunts that cut like the stroke of a whip. But time and place were not propitious. The matter required more serious reflection than he could give it in the hot sunshine of the dusty road.

Before he came to the first houses of Chantilly, Fontenoy had decided on the general outlines of a plan, on which he afterward deliberated more fully in the shade of the silent forest. In the meantime, he had paid his visit of inspection to the horse, but had no heart to assure himself of his good points, or try to detect his weak ones. To the dealer, asking if he did not wish to try him, he absently replied: "Bring him to me to-morrow afternoon," and hurried away as if glad to be released from a disagreeable task.

D'Argillesse's manner of speaking of Edmee had stung him as when a sapling flies back and strikes the face of one passing through a wood. How! *that* man dare assert that Mme. Fontenoy had been the object of his attentions? "Mme.

Fontenoy is not the kind of woman that a man pays court to, sir! She is a woman entirely above suspicion, to whom no one may raise his eyes, even in the way of honest admiration."

But remembering how, no longer ago than yesterday, he had interpreted Malvois' message, simple and straightforward as it was, and intrusted to him for delivery, Fontenoy experienced a considerable abatement of his loftiness. Of course, he could not permit anyone to speak lightly of his wife, even with no other object than the ill-natured one of arousing the jealousy of another woman.

Here Gilbert made a sudden leap to the bottom of his conscience and emerged in a state of excessive humiliation. His wife, set up as a rival to Mme. Verseley, by D'Argillesse!

"I did wrong in allowing myself to become intimate with persons of their stripe," said he to himself, with a sincere sensation of reproach, one of those sensations that penetrate the heart like a knife. "I should never have presented that woman to Mme. Fontenoy, or suffered her to ask her to our house. And I should have waited until I knew more of D'Argillesse; for if it were to do again to-day I would act differently."

This *med culpa* produced a salutary effect. Gilbert took advantage of the momentary respite to make this mental reflection: "Still, it must be admitted that if we associated in society only with those we knew and could vouch for, our acquaintance would be very limited."

His conscience sternly reprimanded him:

“There are several ways of knowing people. You made these particular ones your associates because your vices—”

Fontenoy objected to this. *Vices* was too severe. His conscience went on a little more indulgently:

“Because your weaknesses of the moment found it to their interest. You are not a Cato, my dear Monsieur Fontenoy!”

“Well and good,” he resumed, in his own person, with a shade of annoyance. “We are not talking of me. We are talking of D’Argillesse. What is to be done in relation to him?”

Gilbert saw that it was impossible to answer this question without giving it more deliberate consideration. He remembered now the aversion that Edmee had exhibited to his proposal of inviting D’Argillesse to La Tremblaye, as well as the frankness with which she had subsequently expressed an antipathy bordering on contempt.

“I behaved like a senseless idiot,” he said to himself, “and I am a great deal more fortunate than I deserve to be in having a wife gifted with tact, taste, and—and—”

What else his wife was gifted with he never discovered; but a deep, unconquerable longing to set eyes once more on that female paragon suddenly seized him and drove him off hot-footed to La Tremblaye.

It was near dinner-time when he reached home, weary as to his legs, but very light of

heart. Whatever might be the destiny reserved for D'Argillesse—this point was in abeyance; but the false friend was surely to be punished—Fontenoy was henceforth assured as to his wife's desert, and his heart chanted a pæan of victory.

The voice of conscience is still and small; but very importunate, however.

“False friend?” queried Gilbert's conscience, “do you call him a false friend? Is that because he took Mme. Verseley away from you, or because he tried to rob you of your wife's affection? In either event, tell me, have you never been a false friend to any one?”

But the time for holding a court of inquiry on himself was not yet come. Gilbert brushed aside all such considerations as frivolous and out of season, and returned to the glorious, invincible image of the absent Edmee.

And the night seemed long to him, so great was his desire to meet the candid look of those topaz-colored eyes.

XXII.

It was late when Fontenoy awoke the following morning, for the god of Slumber had not been kind to him during the night; but as he would have the shorter time to wait he did not greatly mind. While eating his breakfast he opened his newspaper, from force of habit mainly, but also because to the countryman

the daily paper affords a perennial interest to which the sated townsman is a stranger.

As he was carelessly running his eye over it, a displayed heading attracted his attention. It was the brief account of a serious railway accident near Étampes. One train had telescoped another. There were two killed and several injured, some of whom were women.

Fontenoy left the table, the victim of indescribable anxiety. Edmee had announced her intention of leaving Paris by a train starting at about that hour. Could it be that she was among the number of the injured?—he dared not think of the dead.

Could it be that his wife, his dear wife, for twenty years his companion, in these more recent times his friend, faithful to him always in spite of his neglect, patient and long-suffering, sympathizing with him in his hours of trouble, and brave—he could see it now—under her gentle and modest exterior—could it be that she was among the victims, was even then suffering fearful torture? The thought was too horrible. It could not be.

He hastened to consult the time-table, intending to go to Paris in quest of tidings. There was no train for two hours—that meant two hours of intolerable suspense. He seated himself by the table, and burying his face in his hands, gave himself up to bitter thoughts.

It was he—he alone—who had caused Edmee's tears to flow; for he remembered now that she had wept. he remembered the melancholy of

the handsome face, and the calm but sorrowful expression with which his wife had answered "No" when he asked her if she had not been happy. Ah, truly she had not been happy, poor woman, if she had experienced one-half the anguish and distress that were now gnawing at his heart!

And what if it should be now too late to tell her of all those things that had just dawned on his consciousness? What if she had departed for a country where the race of ungrateful husbands is not known, or were about departing, and he not given the opportunity to tell her of his regret and remorse? But no, it could not be!

He gave orders to put the horses to the carriage. A train would soon be in from Paris. He would go to the station; perhaps there would be news. Intelligence of such a disaster is not confined to the newspapers; tidings are conveyed by the railway hands from station to station by word of mouth, even along the lines of other roads.

Poor Edmée! She had indeed been patient! Only a few days ago she had spoken to him so kindly when he was suffering — suffering on account of that viper who had dared to apply the epithet simpleton to that pure woman whose shoe she was unworthy to unloose! He remembered the soft slender hands that had eased the pain of his aching brow, and the immediate sensation of relief and comfort that their cool contact had afforded him. He remembered it all as the thirsting traveler in the desert recalls the

iced beverages that he has drunk at home, in the pleasant summer evenings. Ah, those dear hands, the hands of his loyal wife, was he ever to hold them in his own again?

The carriage was ready. He took his seat in it. The coachman, unconscious of his master's anxiety, was disposed to spare the horses. He chid him impatiently and bade him drive faster. The train had not arrived. He paced the platform for what seemed to him an interminable time. At last the signal changed, the locomotive appeared far down the track at the curve, rapidly drew near, passed him, and stopped. Hands, gloved and ungloved, were seen eagerly fumbling at the fastenings of the doors, and on the step of the car directly in front of him appeared a small, high-arched foot, followed by a skirt of which the color was familiar to him, and his wife jumped lightly to the ground.

He darted forward and almost caught her in his arms, greatly to her surprise.

"Edmée!" he murmured, in a choking voice.

His happiness was so great that it bordered on pain. He would have wished to embrace her, press her to his bosom, say and do a thousand idiotic things, but the time and place were not propitious to such effusive demonstrations. He conducted her outside the station, placed her in the open carriage, and they drove rapidly away.

"I had not the least idea of finding you here. It was extremely nice of you to come," Edmée contentedly remarked. "I did not know that I

should be able to get away so early, and therefore did not mention the train I thought of taking."

"If you knew what a fright I've had!" said he, in a low voice.

She looked at him more closely. His face had the worn expression of the days when he was at his worst.

"What was it?" she inquired in alarm.

"That accident, near Étampes. I thought it might be your train."

Edmée's face became very pale. "Was there an accident?" said she. "I knew nothing of it. Oh, my poor friend!"

They had left the last houses of Chantilly behind them. By a common impulse their hands sought each other and were locked in a tight clasp. Fontenoy closed his eyes and was steeped in silent bliss. But he was afraid that he might appear ridiculous in his wife's eyes, and gently released his hand.

"You had not heard of it?" he said, endeavoring to appear more like himself. "So much the better."

"Oh, no! If I had known I should have telegraphed you. Did you think I was in the accident? Were there any people hurt?"

"Some were killed," Fontenoy replied in hollow tones. The torture that he had been enduring for the last hour was still so present to him that he could not think of it without shuddering. "So the papers say, at least."

"It must be a mistake, or at all events an ex-

aggeration," said Edmée, "for I heard no talk of it at Paris this morning, and you know how rapidly such tidings always spread."

"Well, you are safe and sound; that's all I ask," he declared in a tone of relief.

Nothing more was said until they reached La Tremblaye. The change that Mme. Fontenoy perceived in her husband was so great and unexpected that she hardly dared trust her senses. Knowing his peculiar disposition, she made no further advances, for fear lest he might withdraw into himself again; but her heart beat in her bosom with a glad though timid emotion.

"I'll bet you've had no breakfast," said Gilbert, as they were alighting.

"Only a cup of milk this morning," she laughingly replied.

The charm was broken that had caused that pressure of their hands in the carriage. Edmee ascended to her room without any words of more explicit meaning having been exchanged between them. Fifteen minutes later she came down again, took her place at table, and resumed her functions, exactly as if she had never been away.

To behold her once more occupying that place that had been vacant for a week afforded Fontenoy unspeakable delight. Furtively, and while she was not observing him, he watched her most trifling movements and found them characterized by a certain indescribable grace that he was astonished he had never noticed until then. It was the sparing use she made of gestures that

made her so pleasant and reposeful an object for the eye to rest on. She never employed them indeed, except when necessity required them, It was soothing to the mind and to the eye to see a woman who was not in a constant flutter of needless movement.

Where were the storms of the day before and of that morning? The table at which they were seated had an air of joy and cheerfulness with its centerpiece of fruits and flowers, so rich in color, of perfume so penetrating. The two breakfasters had not much to say; but a tacit understanding made their most trifling words important; for they were seasoned with a smile. Suddenly Fontenoy remembered that he had an account to settle with D'Argillesse. He looked at his wife. If she had remained in that dreadful accident it would have been horrible. Such an affliction would have cast a shadow of blood on the remainder of Gilbert's days. But if D'Argillesse had succeeded in his designs it would have been a hundred-fold worse still!

She was saved from every threatened ill, seated at his side, for many a long year, he fondly hoped, unless D'Argillesse were more adroit or luckier than he. He could not endure the thought, and his anger dyed his face of a dull red, even to the temples. The meal was finished. He gave his wife a questioning look, whereon she rose.

"I foolishly allowed myself to be persuaded into promising to try a horse to-day," he said.

"The dealer is to bring him this afternoon some time, at what hour I really cannot say. I had something else on my mind yesterday and did not pay attention to what was said."

"I have had exercise enough to last me for some time," Edmee replied, with a smile. "I shall be glad to remain at home for the rest of the day, if it is agreeable to you."

They went and seated themselves on the inclosed bridge for a comfortable chat, and Mme. Fontenoy had just begun to tell the story of Juliette's sacrifice when word was brought to them that the horse was there. Fontenoy, not with very good grace, left his easy-chair and went down to the court.

The animal seemed to promise well. Fontenoy's horsey instinct could not resist the temptation of getting astride of him. Edmee, impelled by friendly motives, had already offered a lump of sugar that was unceremoniously accepted by the sociable animal, when it occurred to her that the narrow courtyard of the old mill was ill-adapted for equestrian maneuvers.

"You would do better to go out upon the road, my friend," she said to her husband. "I shall be better able to watch the horse's action from the window of the drawing-room, and you will have a fairer opportunity to see how he behaves."

The gate was thrown open to Fontenoy and his mount, who, to their mutual satisfaction,

went through a series of exercises designed to make them better acquainted with each other.

A cloud of dust in the direction of the Frémonts' fortress heralded the approach of some unusual phenomenon. Unusual indeed it was, for the first thing that presented itself to Edmee's vision was little Descrosses, mounted on a small black pony with flowing mane and tail that had an unsavory reputation for viciousness, and whose one object in life was to unseat its rider. Kind-hearted Edmee, perceiving how matters stood, reflected that, while there is no law compelling an attorney to ride like a professor of equitation, still a smattering of the accomplishment might not be amiss, even to a chartered leader of the cotilion.

After him came Mme. Verseley, accompanied by M. Dormant, both well mounted and irreproachable in their equipment, and behind them rode D'Argillesse on the jumping mare, with whom he was evidently on extremely bad terms. She was pulling violently on the bit, with an occasional wicked sidewise lunge, and seemed to be meditating overt rebellion.

At sight of Fontenoy M. Dormant pulled up. Mme. Verseley did the same, and little Descrosses, as soon as he perceived it, wheeled his pony and came and ranged up alongside them.

"Is that horse yours?" inquired M. Dormant.

"Not quite. Almost," Gilbert answered.

"How do you like him?"

"Pretty well. He's a handsome animal; almost too handsome for a horse not intended for

lady's use. He is rather light; but then you're not a heavy man."

Meantime D'Argillesse had rejoined his companions. He pulled in the mare in front of the balcony whence Edmee had not had time to make her retreat and made a low and graceful bow. Edmee answered his salutation without looking at him. Fontenoy had his eye on them both and felt a strong inclination to bring his riding-cane into action; but his false friend had himself under such complete control that it would have been impossible to force a quarrel on him.

"You have got back, I see, madame," said Mme. Verseley, whose eyes had snapped spitefully at sight of Edmee. "Did you have a pleasant journey?"

"Yes, madame; I thank you," civilly replied she who was thus accosted.

After this there was silence. M. Dormant, seeing no reason for remaining longer, gathered up his reins in readiness to move, and little Des-crosses's pony, considering the opportunity too favorable to be neglected, and profiting by his rider's inadvertence, seized the bit in his teeth, broke through the line of other horses, and galloping away like mad in the direction of the feudal castle. The shock sent the young lawyer's hat flying from his head. It struck Coralie on the muzzle, whence it rebounded and fell upon the road.

The mare emitted a shrill cry of rage and terror, and started to back. Behind D'Argillesse and on the opposite side of the road were

a shallow ditch and the wall of a barn, which had once served as a storehouse for the grain of the mill.

“Look out there, D’Argillesse!” shouted Dormant; “that’s a nasty spot.”

D’Argillesse was exerting all his skill to quiet the fractious brute that, with head down and ears laid back, was sniffing and snorting at the ill-starred headpiece. Suddenly she reared straight on end and began to walk backward on her hind legs.

Gilbert, perceiving the gravity of the situation, had jumped down from his horse, and M. Dormant had followed his example. He was certainly resolved to show D’Argillesse no mercy in the duel that he was contemplating; but to see him hurt, perhaps killed, in front of his own door, was another matter, and one that he could not stand by and witness with indifference. M. Dormant and he, one on each side of the maddened brute, tried to seize her by the bridle. Gilbert grasped it once; but a blow of the animal’s head, so violent that he thought his arm was broken, forced him to release his hold.

“Gilbert!” faintly cried Edmee, who, convulsively grasping with both hands the railing of the balcony, was watching the contest with eyes dilated by horror.

Fontenoy turned, oblivious of the danger, and in those eyes which saw but him read all that he had wished to know—the promise of eternal union between their souls, each reconquered by the other.

The mare still continued to back and rear; one of her legs went down into the ditch. Scrambling desperately, she made frantic efforts to preserve her footing.

“Jump!” shouted M. Dormant, in a voice husky with terror.

It was too late. In her efforts to recover herself, and partly also, no doubt, owing to her in-born ugly disposition, Coralie struggled with a fury that made it impossible for D'Argillesse to save himself by leaving the saddle. Then, rearing with all the energy of her perverse nature, she dashed her head against the wall behind her with such violence that she went down, her skull broken, carrying with her her bruised and bleeding rider. Her legs quivered convulsively for a moment, then she exhaled a deep breath that was like a sigh, and was still.

The servants of the house had come running up, attracted by the noise, and now attempted to release the wretched man. Mme. Verseley, who, at the very beginning of the trouble, had prudently taken refuge in the courtyard, where she remained without uttering a word, watched them—a shade more pale than usual—with distended eyes.

Edmee's entire attention had been directed on her husband. When the mare fell, her only thought had been one of thankful joy to see him erect, safe and unhurt. She cast her eyes on the spot where man and horse lay tangled in a confused mass, and the reality of the situation dawned on her mind.

Leaving the house, she came out on the road and instinctively went up to Gilbert, who took her arm and pressed it to his side. Mme. Verseley, motionless in the gateway, eyed the pair with cold contempt.

"He is not dead, is he?" Edmee murmured to her husband below her breath.

Fontenoy shook his head doubtfully. The servants had at last freed the body, and it could be seen as they raised it in their arms, a bloody froth upon the lips, the head hanging down helplessly on the shoulder. They laid him down beside the road, under the window where a moment before Edmee had received his salutation.

M. Dormant bent over him, feeling for the heart. He rose, pale as the dead man himself.

"His neck must have been broken," said he, "and some of the ribs are fractured."

A mounted man was already galloping toward Chantilly in quest of a physician, but mortal assistance was no longer of avail to D'Argillesse.

"Go back indoors, Edmee," said Fontenoy, in a tone of deep tenderness. "You will make yourself ill."

"No," she gently replied. "Have no fear for me. Is it all over?"

"I fear so, madame," answered M. Dormant.

"If that is the case he—the remains ought not to be left lying here in the road," Mme. Fontenoy hesitatingly said.

"We have no litter to carry him on," asserted one of the men.

"That can be arranged," said Fontenoy; "but where are we to carry him? To his inn?"

"My friend," said Edmee, in a low voice and with an accent of ineffable compassion, "this barn is unoccupied. The body might be deposited there temporarily if you have no ob-

jections. It would, at least, be protected from the gaze of the passers."

"You are right," promptly replied her husband, who gave the necessary directions.

M. Dormant had mounted again. Mme. Versey came and took her place beside him. They saluted Fontenoy and his wife before starting on their return to the Frémonts' house. Their salute was civilly returned; but there was no expression visible save pity in Edmee's eyes as they encountered those of her former rival. Truly she was an innocent, this honest woman.

While the servants were preparing a decent resting-place for the dead man's remains, Mme. Fonteney went upstairs to her linen-closet with her bunch of keys and selected a pair of her finest sheets, then took from the guest chamber a crucifix and a branch of evergreen that had been blessed by the priest, and placing the various articles in a basket, dispatched them to the barn. Her husband, coming in at that moment, met her on the staircase as she was descending. He took her by the hand and conducted her to the small drawing-room, where he closed the door and came and took a seat beside her.

"Edmee," he said to her, "I know I am not worthy of you, but I love you with all my heart and soul. This is not a suitable occasion, but some day I will tell you how I came to know you."

She interrupted him with a gesture, so gentle that it could not have been other than a supplication.

"You shall know the story of my life," he continued; "and particularly of these more recent times, my errors, and the means by which I was cured of my blindness."

"I wish to know nothing," she replied, turning on him the golden luster of her liquid orbs, now suffused with tender feeling. "You have

told me that you entertain a friendly feeling toward me."

"It is not friendship alone, Edmee. It is that and a great deal more beside. It is all the affection and gratitude that a man can feel for his wife; for the woman who has all his love and is his for life. My only fear is that you cannot forgive me."

"Forgive you!" she said, with a sigh of happiness. "Ah, the time is passed when I thought I had anything to forgive—long, long ago!" We are no longer young, my friend; but we have still many pleasant and tranquil years to spend together, if it be the will of God; and we may be very happy; for, say what you will, dear Gilbert, we are entirely worthy of each other."

"You are worthy. That I know. Where shall one find a woman as generous as you? That wretch who lies dead below upon the road was not deserving of your pity."

"Had you heard?" asked Edmee, looking with some uneasiness at her husband.

"I heard that he insulted you."

"A woman is not insulted because a man may have formed the intention of insulting her," she replied, averting her eyes. "The offense lies in the one offended, not in the offender. I experienced no feeling of humiliation. Only a little anger at the utmost—and think how swift and severe the punishment has been!"

They were silent. Fontenoy was not altogether satisfied. He would have desired to receive a more absolute pardon. With touching modesty he promised himself to endeavor to earn it.

"Are you sure you are not hurt?" Edmee suddenly inquired. "How is your arm?"

"There is nothing the matter with it, except

that it's a little sore. It will be all right to-morrow."

"Ah!" said she, with an indescribable accent of tenderness and solicitude, "I was horribly frightened!"

Fontenoy recalled the look that they had exchanged and felt that he should not have to wait longer for his pardon; for he had a shrewd suspicion that he had received it at that moment.

"Were you frightened, dear wife?" said he, with the chivalrous gallantry that had made him so dangerous. "Then it must be that you have a little affection for me remaining yet?"

"I have never loved, I shall never love anything in the world as I love you," she replied, giving him her hands.

XXIII.

JULIETTE and her mother arrived in due season, in accordance with the promise made by them.

The shadow that the recent catastrophe had cast over La Tremblaye had vanished. Save for Edmee, who shuddered every time her eyes lit on the fatal wall, and for Fontenoy, who often reflected on the incident that had spared him the necessity of chastising his false friend, the occurrence was, to all appearances, forgotten by the inhabitants of the old mill.

Verseley, upon whom the accident had produced a deep impression, had come down and taken his wife away with him. On learning that she had witnessed the horrible affair, he had manifested alarm as to her nervous condition and hurried her off to the sea-shore, where he surrounded her with all the attentions he could command, although she protested that she had

never been better in her life—a statement that seemed to be confirmed by the perfect poise of all her faculties, mental and physical.

Mme. Verseley had no nerves, or if she had, it was not in the sense that is commonly applied to those necessary components of our organism; and any one who could have penetrated that portion of her nature which served her as a soul, would probably have found there a sensation of profound relief at being delivered from a man who had ceased to please. More than that, the inquirer who thought it worth his while to push his investigations so far, might have discovered that she was not sorry to see that man punished for his bad behavior toward her in paying attentions to another woman before she had restored to him his liberty.

The day when Juliette made her triumphal *entrée*—leading captive her mother, who had at last been subjugated and made to own allegiance to the laws and customs of society—was one of rejoicing at La Tremblaye, and no less so at Cerisy. Comte Forest, who came with Fabien to dine, had decorated his horses' head-stalls with roses in the young lady's honor, and the bouquet that he brought her would have satisfied the most exacting *prima donna*.

"There, little girl," said he, "that's the way we old fellows do things when we have it at heart to please. We have rose-trees whose roses diffuse joy and delight far and wide, and yet it's we who are best pleased of all!"

She thanked him prettily in a few graceful words, with a smile that was new to him, a smile that seemed to light up her face from within, into which she infused a subtler and more mysterious charm than formerly.

Fabien, while hoping that the privilege would soon be accorded him, had brought no flowers. He had brought only himself, a very grave, al-

most severe person in his irreproachable respectability. The poor fellow's mind was greatly disturbed lest he might fail to please Mme. Chassagny.

Who would have thought two weeks ago that that excellent and timid lady had it in her power to inspire in him such terror? He had never even so much as asked himself what her nose might be like. He could see for himself by the way in which Juliette watched her, talked to her continually and brooded over her, so to speak, like a setting hen, that if the young girl had once sinned through indifference she had found her road of Damascus.

Such exclusive attention could not but prove alarming to him. While driving back to Cerisy, after a formal and uninteresting dinner, he opened his mind to Comte Forest on the subject.

"Her road to Damascus?" replied his mentor. "I don't suppose *you* would ever find it out; but from what Mme. Fontenoy tells me, I shouldn't wonder if that miracle were one of your working. But don't let yourself be alarmed unnecessarily. The dear child's outburst of filial affection will moderate down before long. If it doesn't, I know nothing about such matters."

One day, not long after this, while Mme. Chassagny was taking her afternoon siesta, Juliette came to the apartment whose windows commanded a view of the road that led to the Frémonts' castle and took a seat beside her aunt.

"Auntie," she said; "you must have received an awful shaking-up that day—the day of the accident."

"Yes, indeed," Edmee dreamily replied.

A countless host of thoughts and sentiments had interposed between her past and present,

so that she looked back on that incident as a frightful but very remote event; one of those occurrences that belong to history. D'Argillesse's death had no appreciable place in the current of new impressions on whose bosom Mme. Fontenoy allowed herself to be borne gently onward, with an undefined sensation of pleasure, and her eyes, so to speak, bandaged.

She was happy. Happy to an extent that she had never believed possible. Her old, old dream: to win back her husband on the threshold of old age and spend with him in tranquil joy, the joy of the mellow harvest-moon, whatever remaining years their destiny reserved for them, had been realized, and, more than all, had been realized immediately, and with a keen delight of which she had conceived no idea. It was now that for the first time life threw open for her its two-leaved doors. Marveling, she entered in, with the quick impressionability of a child, and all that past suffering can add to the present happiness of a woman.

Her felicity was so great that she was almost ashamed of it, and felt constrained to conceal it even from Fontenoy, although her principal enjoyment consisted in conversing with him on topics that interested him, in thinking aloud in his presence—a thing that she had never done before. And that shy disclosure of the treasures of an intellect which had so long remained closed through indifference or fear, the modesty of that tender affection which hesitated to display itself in its pure nudity, filled her husband with an exquisite delight, without limits and without end—a delight, that is to say, the duration of whose existence was bound to be co-existent with their own.

Juliette had been watching the various expressions that played over Mme. Fontenoy's countenance. Although in many respects a

mere child, she knew her aunt, and could often divine what was passing in her mind.

"And my uncle, too," she went on; "it must have given *him* a start! When you wrote telling me about it, I was afraid he might be taken sick—not from grief, though. As for me—I know that what I'm going to say is downright mean, but I don't care—do you know I was not the least bit sorry?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Edmee, highly scandalized.

"Not — the — least — bit!" Juliette repeated, emphasizing her words. "He was a gentleman—well, now that he's dead you'll hardly expect me to preach his funeral sermon; but he got just what he deserved! There!"

The clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard outside upon the road, and Juliette raised herself a little to see who it might be. She would not have dared do it at Paris, but in the country more latitude is allowed.

"It's little Descrosses," said she. "I should think his experience that day would have cured him of his passion for horseback exercise. Perhaps he has a large assortment of hats, though. When I was little I knew—"

"M. Malvois," announced the footman.

Fabien entered, almost as severe and rigid as on the previous occasion. Had some foul sorcerer broken the cord that he had fondly believed was stretched between them, an invisible bridge over which their souls might pass and meet each other? He kissed Edmee's hand, bowed to Juliette, and sedately took a seat.

"Did you meet M. Descrosses?" asked Edmee.

"I just caught a glimpse of him, no more," the precise Fabien replied.

"You did see him, monsieur? Then I may go on with what I was saying," Juliette declared, with a mischievous smile. "When I was little I knew a monkey who rode horse-

back—not for his pleasure—on a black poodle, and not for the poodle's pleasure, either. Well; little Descrosses's style of riding is exactly like that monkey's; only he is not compelled to ride, and the monkey was, which makes it all the more inexcusable for the man!"

"You are too bad!" said Edmee, who could not keep from laughing.

Fabien was in raptures. In his beatitude he asked for tidings of Mme. Chassagny.

"She is slumbering, thanks, monsieur," Juliette demurely replied.

All her words and actions were marked by such exuberant drollery that her aunt looked at her with some solicitude. It was the innocent playfulness of a kitten, that sports and frolics in pure wantonness of animal spirits.

Mme. Fontenoy was a little afraid that she might go too far and say something that might better be left unsaid; but Malvois' gravity seemed sufficiently to offset her levity, so she rose, and, without the affectation of excusing herself, left them alone together. Juliette's face immediately became serious.

"Mademoiselle," said Fabien, determined that he would not this time let the occasion slip through his fingers; "I have sympathized profoundly with you in your time of trouble. The happy tidings of your mother's recovery filled me with delight. I hope now that—"

He stopped, disturbed by a dancing, fantastic light that he saw in Juliette's eyes.

"That—?" she encouragingly said.

"That she will continue to enjoy good health," he testily concluded.

It is hard to be ridiculed when one is in earnest, and Fabien's disposition was not exactly lamblike.

"I hope so, too," said Juliette, who felt a strong inclination to laugh. The kitten that

was in her had found its plaything and could not resist the desire to have a little sport. But she composed her features to a more serious expression. The eyes that were bent on her were not those of a man with whom she could venture to trifle.

"Do you remember what we were saying the night my aunt and I started off so suddenly?" she continued. "I was telling you that I dearly loved my poor mamma. It was the truth. My conscience reproached me, and I promised myself that I would never leave her again."

It was rather hard on Fabien. He had been dreaming of an existence of quite a different nature.

"But lo and behold!" Juliette went on, "she won't have it so. She says that civilized people are tiresome, and declares she won't be bothered with them. Still, we can't go back again to the savage state, can we?"

"Certainly not, mademoiselle!" replied Fabien, with a slight increase of confidence.

"So we settled the matter on equitable principles—give and take. She is to remain here two weeks, then will go back to the Clocher and have a month of solitude, and after that will come to us at Paris. I remember reading something like that in the mythology—who was it, Ceres or Proserpine? I've forgotten—"

"Ceres was the mother, mademoiselle."

"That's the way it is, then: Ceres is mamma, the goddess of harvests. I wish you could see the Beauce, monsieur; it is magnificent—so every one says, at least. But for my part—"

She was unable to endure Fabien's ardent gaze, and lowered her eyes.

"You prefer La Tremblaye?"

She nodded her head in affirmation. He drew his chair a little nearer.

"If you knew, mademoiselle, how glad I

should be to live either in the Beauce or at La Tremblaye if—if it wouldn't be too disagreeable to madame your mother—”

Juliette said nothing. He drew nearer still, and the remainder of the conversation was too confidential to be reported to unsympathizing readers.

They talked for a long time, so long that the dinner hour was near at hand when Fontenoy, his wife, and Mme. Chassagny entered the room, accompanied by Comte Forest, who had come to take away his young friend and was himself inveigled into remaining for dinner. Juliette, her cheeks as red as a new-blown rose, on seeing them rose and made the following statement:

“Since you come in like a troupe of actors making their entrée at the end of the piece, it will be as well for all of us to abandon the pretense of being blind to what is going on. We are engaged, and if M. Malvois is the man I take him to be he will step straight up to my darling little mamma and ask her for my hand.”

She ran to her mother and threw her arms about her, and that was the end of the matter.

After dinner—the evening being warm and pleasant—they all went out for a while upon the veranda. Juliette stood aside a little, and plucking gently at Malvois' sleeve, drew him back beside her.

“Make way for the lovers,” she said in a whisper.

“And who may they be?” asked Fabien wonderingly.

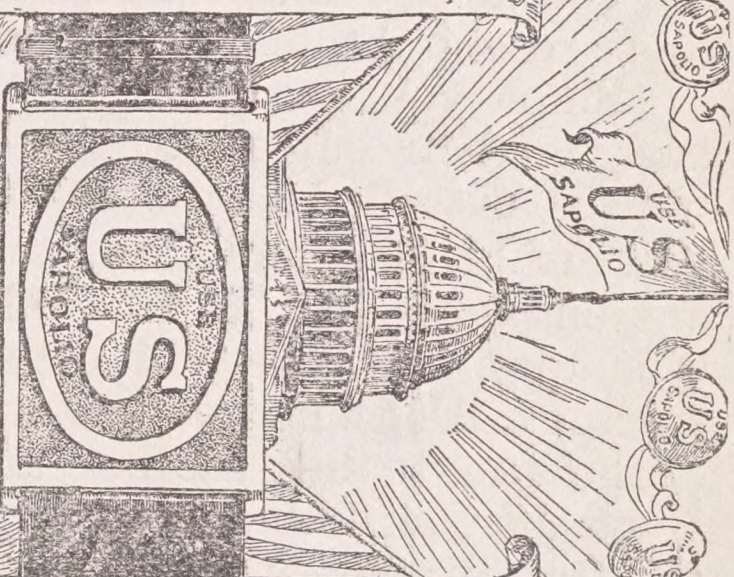
With a charming gesture she pointed to Fontenoy, who was contemplating his wife very tenderly.

THE END.



Few men have ever really known.
And few would ever guess
What our country means by marking
All her chattels with **U.S.**

We see it on our bonds and bills.
And on our postal cars.
It decorates our Capitol
Shadowed by Stripes and Stars.
In all our barracks posts and forts.
It plays a leading part
And the jolly sailor loves it
And enshrines it in his heart.



It may stand for United States
Or yet for Uncle Sam.
But there's still another meaning
To this simple monogram.

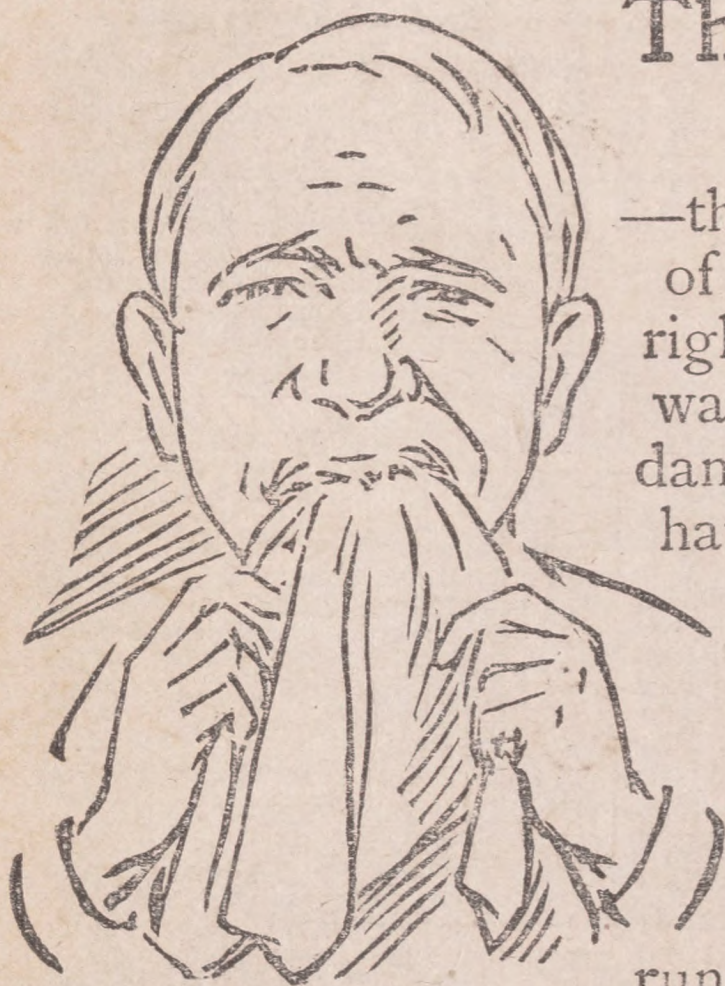
Now, have you guessed the message
Which these mystic letters bear?
Or recognized the untold good
They're spreading everywhere?

Echo the joyful tidings.
And let the people know
That the **U.S.** of our nation means
We **Use Sapolio**.



UNCLE SAM

will bring you a cake of NEW PROCESS DOG BISCUIT for 5 cents; a cake of BIRD MANNA for 15c. This is a most wonderful SONG RESTORER for Canaries and all other Cage Birds. U. S. will bring you FREE either a Bird Book, Dog Book, Horse and Cattle Book, paper of Fronefield's Cattle Powder, box of Corn Salve or Dye Color, if you name the paper in which you saw this. Address THE BIRD FOOD COMPANY, 400 North 3d Street, Philadelphia, Pa.



The "Eating" of Clothes

—the rotting and ruining of them—won't show right away. Your new washing powder may be dangerous, but you'll have to wait a little for its results. But it is doing its work, After a while, your clothes go to pieces, all at once. Now isn't it better not to run any risk? Isn't it

better to trust to an article like Pearline, which has been tried, tested, proved?

Pearline is manufactured only by 343 JAMES PYLE, N. Y.

Carl L. Jensen's

CARL L. JENSEN'S CRYSTAL PEPSIN TABLETS will cure Dyspepsia and will prevent Indigestion from rich food. Dose 1 tablet after each meal. Delivered by mail for 50c. in stamps. CARL L. JENSEN CO., 400 North Third Street Philadelphia, Pa. Samples and Circulars **FREE.**

BURNETT

--- AT THE ---

CHICAGO EXPOSITION

WHAT THE RESTAURATEURS AND CATERERS WHO ARE TO FEED
THE PEOPLE INSIDE THE FAIR GROUNDS THINK OF
BURNETT'S EXTRACTS:

CHICAGO, April 2d, 1893.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.

Gentlemen: After careful tests and investigation of the merits of your flavoring extracts, we have decided to give you the entire order for our use, in our working department as well as in all our creams and ices, used in all of our restaurants in the buildings of the World's Columbian Exposition at Jackson Park.

Very truly yours,
WELLINGTON CATERING CO.
By ALBERT S. GAGE, President.

CHICAGO, April 26th, 1893.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.,

Boston and Chicago.

Gentlemen: After careful investigation we have decided that BURNETT'S Flavoring Extracts are the best. We shall use them exclusively in the cakes, ice creams and pastries served in Banquet Hall and at New England Clam Bake in the World's Fair Grounds.

N. E. WOOD, Manager,
New England Clam Bake Building.
F. K. McDONALD, Manager,
Banquet Hall.

WOMAN'S BUILDING, }
WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION. }
CHICAGO, April 21st, 1893.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.,

Boston and Chicago.

Gentlemen: We take pleasure in stating that BURNETT'S Flavoring Extracts will be used exclusively in the Garden Cafe, Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, during the period of the World's Fair.

RILEY & LAWFORD.

COLUMBIA CASINO CO.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.,

Boston and Chicago.

Gentlemen: We take pleasure in stating that BURNETT'S Flavoring Extracts will be used exclusively in the cuisine of the Columbia Casino Restaurant, at the World's Fair Grounds, as it is our aim to use nothing but the best. Respectfully,

H. A. WINTER, Manager.

TRANSPORTATION BUILDING, }
WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION. }
CHICAGO, April 24, 1893.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.

Gents: After careful tests and comparisons we have decided to use "BURNETT'S EXTRACTS" exclusively in our ice creams, ices and pastry. Very respectfully,

SCHARPS & KAHN,
Caterers for the "Golden Gate Cafe,"
Transportation Building.

"TROCADERO,"
Cor. 16th Street and Michigan Avenue.

"THE GREAT WHITE HORSE" INN CO., }
WORLD'S COLUMBIAN }
EXPOSITION GROUNDS. }

CHICAGO, ILL., U. S. A., April 26, 1893.

Messrs. JOSEPH BURNETT & Co.,

Boston and Chicago.

Gentlemen: It being our aim to use nothing but the best, we have decided to use BURNETT'S Flavoring Extracts *exclusively*, in the ice cream, cakes and pastries served in "The Great White Horse" Inn, in the grounds of the World's Columbian Exposition. Very truly yours,

T. B. SEELEY, Manager,
"The Great White Horse" Inn Co.

The Restaurants that have contracted to use BURNETT'S EXTRACTS, exclusively,
are as follows:

WELLINGTON CATERING CO.,
"GREAT WHITE HORSE" INN,
THE GARDEN CAFE,
WOMAN'S BUILDING.

COLUMBIA CASINO CO.,
THE GOLDEN GATE CAFE,
NEW ENGLAND CLAM BAKE CO.,
BANQUET HALL.

JOSEPH BURNETT & CO., BOSTON, MASS.

" WORTH A GUINEA A BOX."

BEECHAM'S PILLS

CURE
SICK HEADACHE,
DISORDERED LIVER, ETC.

They Act Like Magic on the Vital Organs, Regulating the Secretions, restoring long lost Complexion, bringing back the Keen Edge of Appetite, and arousing with the ROSEBUD OF HEALTH the whole physical energy of the human frame. These Facts are admitted by thousands, in all classes of Society. Largest Sale in the World.

Covered with a Tasteless & Soluble Coating.

Of all druggists. Price 25 cents a box.

New York Depot, 365 Canal St.







LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



00014990525